

GYPSYING THROUGH  
CENTRAL AMERICA

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EUGENE CUNNINGHAM



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CENTRAL AMERICA**



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THE AUTHOR AND THE PHOTOGRAPHER, MAZATLAN.

*[Frontispiece.]*

# GYPSYING THROUGH CENTRAL AMERICA

By EUGENE CUNNINGHAM

*With Photographs by*  
NORMAN HARTMAN

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TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
J. D. C.  
WHO HAS GONE AHEAD  
ON  
THE LONG TRAIL

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## FOREWORD

THE narrative following is the chronicle of a trip conceived in restlessness, planned in perversity (almost), and executed in genuine enjoyment. Norman Hartman and I had talked for years of exploring some land not too well known, too easy of access. We considered the republics of Central America somewhat casually at first, but when such banana-republic consuls as we could locate in San Francisco dilated upon the difficulty—the impossibility, according to some of them—of such a journey as we mentioned, then we were sure that no other venture would suit us.

My chronicle is the unvarnished account of our gypsying. In much briefer form it appeared serially in *The Wide World Magazine* last year, and some isolated incidents have been treated in short articles for various newspapers and magazines during the past fifteen months. That my opinion of the natives of the Five Republics will be in part disagreed with by others who know these lands is undoubted. But the story of our experiences may throw additional light upon peoples and countries often treated as *opéra bouffe*.

EUGENE CUNNINGHAM.

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA.

February 1922.





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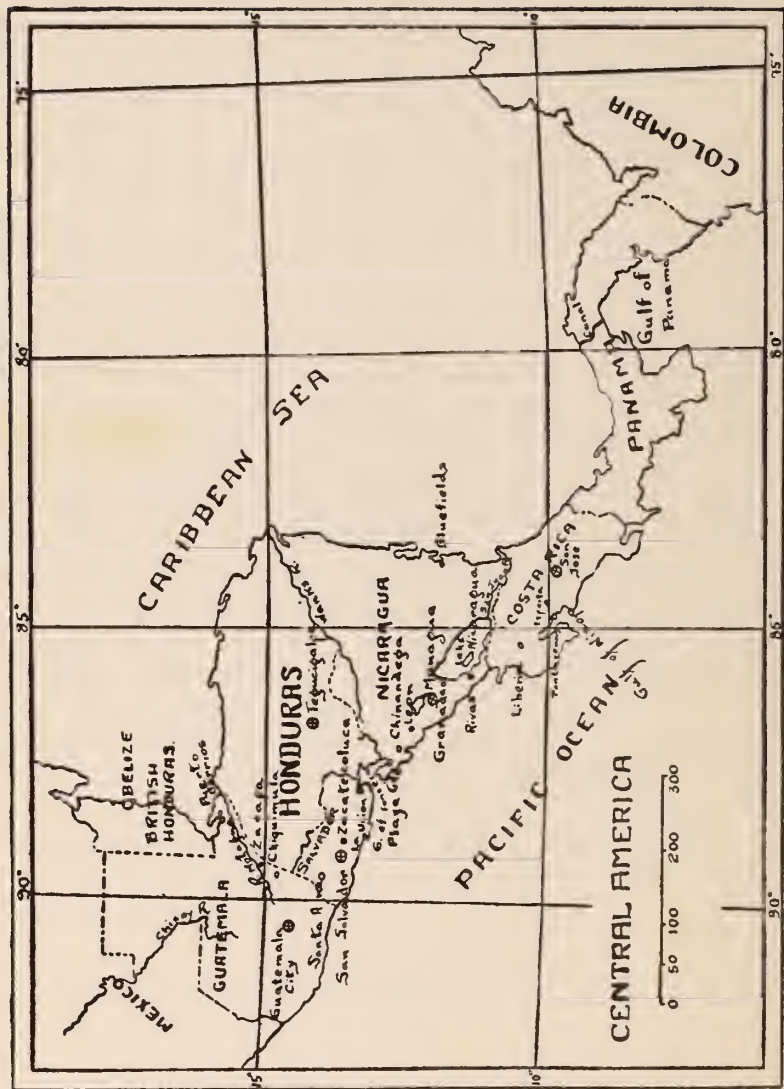
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# GYPSYING THROUGH CENTRAL AMERICA

## CHAPTER I

### INTO MAÑANA LAND

ON THE SOUTH'ARD TRACK—ASHORE AT PUNTARENAS—COSTA RICA  
VERSUS MEXICO—CENTRAL AMERICAN POLICE—THE QUEEN CITY—  
AMONG THE HORSE-TRADERS—TROPICAL RED-TAPE—POINTING THE  
HORSES NORTH—WHERE COFFEE GROWS—ESPARTA IN FESTIVAL  
TIME.

ON a cool, grey December morning we followed our luggage down to San Francisco's Embarcadero. The pier was thronged with passengers and idlers, and heaped high with freight. Through narrow lanes between boxes and bales chanting stevedores pushed their trucks up to the yawning cargo-ports of the steamer. To right and left were other ships at other piers, their black masts stabbing the misty sky, the very pencils that write Adventure.

Dawn of Christmas Day found us outside the coastal fog-belt, steaming close to the low, brown hills of California, that rise abruptly from the white line of surf.

One Mexican port, one Central American harbour, is very like its neighbour. As the old *Para* stood to south'ard at a dignified, nine-knot waddle, we became very familiar with the rumble of her anchor chain, and



watched but listlessly while green parrots, tiny parakeets, purple and scarlet macaws and great grey jays fluttered up with raucous screams from palm-groves along the dazzling beach.

Always there was a sunbrowned white man or two, exiles of commerce, to come off in a shore-craft and receive a meagre bundle of newspapers and letters. Then the thirtieth day after departure from San Francisco found us coasting a low, sandy shore. In early afternoon the *Para* nosed round a squat promontory and her anchor splashed in the green, clear waters of the Gulf of Nicoya. We stared across a scant half-mile of sunny water at Puntarenas, Pacific port of Costa Rica, a rambling beach-town that might have been lifted bodily from the pages of *Cabbages and Kings*.

All along the narrow, golden crescent of wave-lapped beach were trees; tall, graceful palms, manzanillos—"little apples"—and matapalas with glossy green leaves. Through interstices in the foliage the houses of the town gleamed white in the sunlight. Upon the shore a rambling frame building was proclaimed "hotel" by a dingy sign upon its seaward front. Below it, a pagoda-shaped bath-house perched on tall piles over the water, flanked by a palisaded swimming-enclosure.

We stood guard upon our baggage until a dapper youngster in white ducks and military cap cast a perfunctory glance at our passports. The Captain of the Port Guard was followed by the Port Doctor, who examined eyes and tongue, then with a wave of the hand pronounced us eligible for entry into Costa Rica. Our luggage was lowered into one of the swarm of dugouts wheeling and turning off the gangway; the pair of swarthy, half-naked boatmen dug their paddles into the water, and the shoreline leaped forward to meet us.



Remembering vividly the high tariff of Mexico, as published in the ports we had seen coming south, we held our breath as the customs inspectors pounced upon the bags of saddlery, camp equipment, and personal gear. But the size of our bags seemed to appal them. One tapped a bag wearily.

"Personal *equipaje*?" he inquired, and I nodded. It was personal equipage.

"*Bueno! No examinar,*" said Señor Inspector in a relieved tone.

So all our baggage was dumped upon the scales, weighed in jigtime, and I stood before the cashier, a trifle dazed, gripping a *chit* for one colon and thirty-four centavos. Three hundred-odd pounds of highly dutiable equipment paid duty in the equivalent of forty-seven cents, United States currency!

Darkness dropped down abruptly, as if the sun had suddenly been blown out. Our possessions were piled in a room of the Hôtel Europa by the carriers, and we went into the big dining-room overlooking the Gulf, where the rattle of crockery was muffled by the wash of waves upon the sand beneath the floor. It was a most eatable meal, from watery cabbage soup to excellent *café negro*.

When we had eaten we wandered along the Esplanade, a stretch of concrete sidewalk skirting the beach, with iron benches set beneath the trees beside it. The promenade ended at the bath-pavilion on the pier, and here it was that we really entered *Anchuria*.

With darkness had come a cool breeze from the Gulf. The townspeople, who had kept to the shaded coolness of the houses during the torrid afternoon, now sauntered slowly through the streets. White-clad couples drifted ghostlike through the gloom, to pause

beside the little groups seated in open doorways, or loaf down to the pavilion where tables overlooked the frothy surf-fringe.

In the shallow enclosure, guarded by the palisades against marauding sharks, the younger generation, nearly nude, splashed and laughed. Their elders occupied themselves with talk, and tall frosted glasses of *limonada*, or that intriguing cocktail made by pouring brandy and other things into a green coco-nut from which the end has been chopped.

As we strolled back toward the hotel the luminous yellow moon climbed out of the black water astern of the *Para*, still anchored in the offing. Beneath the trees outside a tiny drinking-place were set tables, and at one of these we found a couple of Americans. We sat with them for a time, listening to pages from the Book of the Tropics, with the subdued tinkle of guitars and low voices chanting monotonous, interminable melodies coming from the houses along the street. Horse and mule; jungle-path and mountain-trail—so ran the talk at our table in the mellow glare from an open window of the *pulquería*.

A horde of inch-long cockroaches disputed possession of our cots with us. As we routed the last interloper the *Para's* siren bellowed hoarsely, and we watched her crawl seaward with the line of her lighted cabins shining like the windows of some great hotel. With her going was snapped our last tie with the States; we stood in the anteroom of the tropics; to-morrow the door would swing wide at our touch.

Breakfast, in Central America, comes at noon, but from six to nine is "*desayuno*"—"the first meal"—when the native breaks his fast with coffee and unsalted wheaten bread. We sat at a table looking over the



MARKET WOMAN, MAZATLAN.



water at seven-thirty, with a bushy-whiskered *mozo* smiling widely upon us.

"Am-er-ee-cans?" he inquired. We nodded.

"*Sí*," I said. "*Porqué*—why?"

But he had scurried kitchenward, and when he reappeared he balanced a great tray from which came oranges, greenish yellow and peeled, each skewered upon a fork, with bacon, eggs and toast and coffee-pot. He beamed upon us.

"Brek-fuss!" he announced triumphantly. "White—mans—eat-mooch!"

He waved his hands and shrugged smilingly, as if conceding the right of the paler race to consume a full meal in the dawning. Norm, meanwhile, was investigating the coffee-pot, which he found to contain only hot milk.

"But the coffee, *hombre*!" I protested.

He smiled reassuringly, and raised his apron to fish from a southern pocket a pint whisky flask. With an expression as of one unfolding deep, dark mysteries, he poured into our cups an inch or so of inky coffee extract, then filled the cups a-brim with hot milk and pushed the sugar toward us. When he moved to replace the bottle in its hiding-place Norm shot out a dextrous hand and captured it.

"Don't trouble," said Norm blandly. "I'll take charge of the obsequies."

When one is newly come from the chaos and filth that is Mexico to-day, has experienced on almost every side the hatred and distrust of a white face which in that unfortunate land is either openly displayed or hid beneath a thin mask of servility prompted by greed for foreign dollars, the cheerful friendliness of the Costaricense is welcome indeed. We occupied our morning

in exploring Puntarenas, and it was our ramble-tour which prompts the above statement.

The town, we found, boasts a population of five thousand, but conceals—conversationally, at least—existence of the worst climate in all of Costa Rica. The early morning and late evening hours are the only agreeable portions of the day, for the white beach at other times fairly radiates the intense sunlight, and back upon the town sweeps a palpable wall of heat unrelieved by any breeze. There can have been only scant change in the place in the past quarter-century; a rickety electric plant, a small water-system and a smaller ice factory—these are the only modern touches.

Outside the market-place, along the near-by streets, the native women still keep tiny street-restaurants like those of Mexico, but cleaner—far cleaner! At these little booths plantains—the big brothers of the banana—boiled, fried and roasted; bananas, oranges, pine-apples and coco-nuts; chickens, *tortillas*—flat cornmeal cakes—and boiled rice, white cheese and queer sweet-meats are cooked and eaten on the spot.

Looking back upon our time in Puntarenas, it seems to me that in no other place I have ever visited were the police so omnipresent, yet so—so non-apparent, to employ a paradoxical figure that best expresses my recollection. There was a half-brigade of dusky, bare-footed little men in khaki; every street corner had its guardian; ever and anon a blaring of bugles, a deafening boom of drums, announced the ceremony of guardmount. Yet we never saw a man arrested, were never recipients of other than amiable, half-apologetic smiles from any member of the “Force.”

We visited the *Cuartel*—combination military post and jail, for in Central America the police force is a



national institution—and asked permission to photograph the force. Don Arturo Araya, Assistant Commandant, requested us to return in the afternoon. We fancied the delay was made to give him time to consult higher authority, so we bowed and departed.

In the afternoon, when we had done “breakfast” at the Europa, we strolled toward the *Cuartel*. The drowsy quiet of midday rested upon all the town; we were almost the only persons on the streets. But it wasn’t entirely the hush of *siesta*-time that marked the atmosphere of strangeness we felt; it was that subtle difference one marks with the absence of a familiar object. Then Norm stopped short.

“The police!” he cried. “Where are they this afternoon?”

Then I realized that we had come a dozen squares without sight of a single dusky guardian of the peace. At the *Cuartel* the phenomenon was explained; the entire Puntarenas brigade, in dress uniform and headed by Don Arturo and his *tenientes*—lieutenants—in ceremonial blue and scarlet, waited to be photographed. More amenable subjects I have never seen—even in Central America.

We were up before the dawn on our third day in Puntarenas, for the daily train to San José, like an old hand at tropical journeying, leaves for the capital at six. The porter volunteered to handle our luggage, and called in a half-dozen *hombres* to help him. We watched bags and suitcases go creaking through the darkness to the station, piled high on an ox-cart, then sat down to coffee and cigarettes.

At the station was a chattering throng wandering about the waiting-room. Barefooted *peones*, machetes dangling from broad belts, were all about us. They

bore in woven-grass *alforjas*—saddle-bags—across their shoulders food for the journey; oranges, bananas, coco-nuts, sugarcane, *tortillas*. Whole families panted in thus burdened, or, if “*calzados*,” the “shoe-wearing class,” followed by a brawny *mozo* grunting beneath the impedimenta of the entire group.

The *ferrocarril* connecting Puntarenas with San José is Government-owned—and looks it. All the tracks in Central America are of the narrow-gauge persuasion, but not all the locomotives—thanks be—burn wood. We settled in an American-style coach of fairly modern type, to watch the other passengers embark, native way.

For a mile or more out of Puntarenas the glassy Gulf, just reddened at the far edge by the rising sun, was on our right. On the other hand we skirted the broad, sluggish Rio Barranca, walled in on the opposite bank by green, cool jungle. Farther on coco-palms and plantations of bananas and plantains began to appear beside the track as the jungle thinned; horses and cattle grazed in flat, green pastures.

At all stations—and they were legion—we were besieged by troops of children vending oranges, bananas, fruit of the prickly pear cacti, cheese sandwiches of unmistakable lustiness, *tortillas* rolled into cylinders and filled with chopped meat, grated cheese and *chilis*, the tiny, fiery red pepper so beloved of the native. Old women, bearing steaming pots and little cups, filed up and down the aisle offering “*Café! Café!*” in funereal wails.

At nine-fifteen came the event of the trip—we met the down-train at Escobal. The engineers halted each his engine so that passengers on either train might chat for a time through the coach-windows with their acquaintances. Then we moved on.



Twisting and turning, writhing almost back upon itself at times, but ever climbing, the track skirted the flanks of the wooded Cordilleras, affording magnificent vistas across deep, forested gorges and broad, smiling valleys, where one caught sight of the thatched hut of a woodcutter or *peon*-farmer nestling in a tiny, emerald-floored clearing, or clinging desperately to an out-thrust shoulder upon a sheer slope.

The air was wine-like, crystal-clear; the sky behind the fleets of woolly cirrus clouds of the deepest, softest, fairy blue. Distances were marvellously diminished; it seemed that one might stretch out a casual arm and touch the dollish figures before the tiny cabins—a mile or so away across a yawning cañon.

After the intense midday heat of the seaboard the cool breeze of the highlands was very welcome—but it had drawbacks. Through the open windows of the coach—everyone, regardless of sex, was puffing at cigar or cigarette—came showers of sparks from the locomotive-stack, threatening to set the train ablaze. Then we noticed the conductor's orthodox blue serge coat to be pitted and scarred from many trips.

Observing a staid, dignified *caballero* in the seat ahead of us to come suddenly to his feet and commence spirited oration, his very mustachios aquiver with earnestness, I abandoned notebook to learn the reason for his staccato Spanish. Then the orator's seatmate rose also, to slap out a merry blaze in his companion's shirt.

Shortly before noon, with a triumphant squeal from the engine whistle, the train pulled into San José, "Queen of Central American Cities." Here we disembarked: the priests, the prosperous merchants, the well-to-do farmers with their families; Englishmen, Germans, Italians, Frenchmen, a half-dozen Americans.

Like every other Central American station of our experience, that of San José was about as sleepily quiet as a boiler factory. The bootblacks, a small army in themselves, with their eternal wail of "*Limpio ! Limpio !*" ("Clean ! Clean !"); the men who implored permission—at the tops of their voices—to carry our baggage; the *cocheros* who would not be gainsaid, but strove to hustle us, willy-nilly, into their rickety carriages; the train guards, whose official positions required much authoritative shouting; the passengers, greeting and being greeted by their friends across the station—all contributed their quota to the din. It was with strained ear-drums that we escaped to outside air and, with a tattered urchin following with our hand baggage, leaped into the nearest coach and headed for the Hôtel Gran Française.

Our memories of San José will ever be pleasant. The capital, set upon a tableland nearly a mile above sea-level, greets the visitor with a temperate climate the year round. Winter and summer, in the tropics, are replaced by dry and rainy seasons, the rain commencing usually in April, continuing until November, with the heaviest downfall in September and October. But even during these stormy months the mornings—in San José—are beautifully clear.

As in most Latin countries, here the bulk of the army is posted near the seat of government. One must believe that promotion in the Costa Rican army is very rapid. Few of the two thousand-odd barefooted, denim-clad *soldados* are below the rank of colonel, and once we saw four generals in a single stroll about Central Plaza. We observed, I admit, a few mere sergeants and corporals, but these were evidently very raw recruits, ostentatiously snubbed by the remainder of *El Ejército*.

Up and down the narrow, cobbled streets squeal the brilliantly painted ox-carts, drawn by placid-eyed steers and guided by sturdy, sandalled *hombres*. Mule-carts are as common as the ox-wains and as bright of hue. But there is a difference in the appearance of the drivers; where the ox-driver's machete hangs to the yoke between the bullocks' heads, the *mulatero's* weapon swings at a cocky, you-be-blown angle from a broad belt of many buckles about his waist. Something of a swaggerer is the *mulatero*.

*Coches* drawn by one or two ribby horses at breakneck gallop whirl around corners and thread their way without check among the other vehicles and the pedestrians with which the streets are crowded. Each *cochero* keeps up a frantic honking on the automobile horn which is the standard equipment for vehicles of every sort in San José.

We rose betimes on the second morning in the capital, springing out of the shell of blankets and spare clothing with which we had encased ourselves, turtle-wise, against the keen night air of the plateau. Our destination was the horse market, and in the tropics business is chiefly transacted in the cool hours of early morning.

After coffee we engaged Willy, Jamaican boy-of-all-work at the Française, and set out for the *Feria de Ganado*—the "Horse Fair"—lying on the outskirts of the capital. This is an enclosure of perhaps ten acres, with a great stone-floored shed in the centre for dickering in the rainy weather. To this spot on Saturday morning repairs every farmer and horse-coper of the neighbourhood owning a nag able to navigate, to commit—in intent, at least—robbery without arms.

The field was covered with men and horses when we arrived. Not since my days in the stockyards of Fort

Worth had I seen so many animals. We wandered up and down with Willy, pricing horse after horse. The owners, after one glance at our white collars—unmistakable signs of wealth, these—flicked the ashes from their cigarettes with careless mien and murmured sums that sounded like shrewd guesses at the cost of the Great War. Willy finally informed us, quite superfluously, that horses and mules were said to be "*muy caro*"—very dear.

Once we were identified as prospective purchasers, down upon us swooped the dealers, sombreroed, mustachioed *hombres* in denim trousers and fringed leather leggings, with huge spurs strapped to broad, bare feet. They sat their little mounts like Cossacks or Texas waddies, came galloping decrepit nags up to us to cry exorbitant prices, mingling with their demands fulsome praise of the poor skeleton in question.

After an hour of this aimless wandering a dealer dashed across the field, slid to a halt in mid-gallop at my shoulder and invited me to mount. She was a nervous little bay mare, but clean-limbed and just turning seven years, so I swung into the flat cowhide saddle.

Like most Central American nags, she was a "spur-horse," requiring the rowel to govern her. My heels were unarmed, and in the middle of the yard she began to fight for her head, rearing and bucking alternately, to the vast delight of the onlookers, who desired nothing more than sight of a proud *macho*—American—flat in the dust. But the little mare had nothing new in her repertoire, and, though she bucked and squealed alarmingly, quieting her was more spectacular than difficult.

The dealer asked only two hundred colones for the mare. According to his modest claims, she was without





BOATBUILDER TOO BUSY TO STOP FOR THE PICTURE.



HORSE FAIR, SAN JOSÉ.



mark or blemish, of illustrious lineage, raised a pet of the family, accustomed to dining with the children ; she shivered at a harsh word, whinnied at the back-door of Saturday nights for her bath and must never be taken into the rain without her overshoes. So I offered colones one hundred forty for the paragon ; he countered by demanding one hundred eighty. A deadlock ensued, then he wiped his eyes at thought of his hungry children and accepted colones one hundred fifty-five.

Norm, meanwhile, had acquired a rangy, hammer-headed grey-blue brute for colones two hundred forty. This horse looked strong enough to bear Norm's near two hundred pounds, but appearances—— However, *Azulero*, as they named the grey, figures hereafter. Next came the villain of our equine comedy ; we still lacked a pack-horse, and so inspected all the older nags on the lot. At last, for just half the hundred fifty colones originally demanded, we bought a hoary, sad-faced white *caballo*.

With a self-important urchin aboard *Blanco*, the pack-horse, and leading the other animals, we turned to leave the market. But the gateman performed a Thermopylæ, with many gestures and burning language. Like the villain in the melodrama, he demanded, " The Papers ! The PAPERS !! " At last it was discovered that he must see bills of sale on the three nags before we might take them away. So Willy went in search thereof.

Willy drifted back at last with the vendors of the saddle-stock and the report that the guileless young man who had unloaded *Blanco* had disappeared. So we went before an official in the market-office and executed formal bills of sale.

The seller is supposed to pay the twenty-five centavo

tax on these documents, and José Montra, vendor of Azulero, produced the fee without comment. But Pedro Campos, responsible for my ownership of the red mare, was made of sterner stuff—or had been longer at the game perhaps. He refused to pay the tax; remained obdurate under Willy's most eloquent appeals. Much to Willy's disappointment—he was barely warmed up—I laid down a *billete* of the required denomination. Campos departed, pursued into the hazy distance by the choicest wildflowers of Willy's large and colourful vocabulary.

Then, to preserve some semblance of record in the case of Blanco, the official drew up a weird document, whereby it was made clear that I, having attained my majority by accident of birth within the United States and subsequent premeditated travel in the great and sovereign Republic of Costa Rica, had, in the absence of the animal's legitimate and lawful owner, sold, vended and disposed of said *caballo blanco*, of age, ancestry, appetite and disposition unknown, to myself.

Regretting that such had not really been the case, so that I could have made myself reduce the price to me, but considering such a document cheap at the price demanded, I crossed the resourceful official's palm with silver and we left the market.

A month—or longer—in the Queen City might be pleasantly idled away, if one but cared to stroll and look and listen. We regretted that our animals were eating us into involuntary bankruptcy and so making necessary a speedy departure from this colourful city of the table-land. But the trail beckoned; we prepared for speedy inspanning.

When I think of the official red-tape of those miniature, half-savage countries, I am always reminded of a verse



of Berton Braley's, read with keen appreciation since my return :

“ Do you figure for a moment the trouble and the fret

Which a traveller to-day must undergo ?

All the passports and the papers and the visas you must get,

All the bureaucratic satraps and officials to be met,

And the bothers and delays that you must know ? ”

Thanks to the assistance of Mr. Chase, the American Consul, we easily secured permits to carry firearms, and visas from the Honduran and Nicaraguan Consuls-General. More and more it was brought to us that the journey we contemplated was highly unusual. Some kindly old-timer walked out of his way almost daily to tell us that the trip was practically impossible—at least, without a trusty guide. So Norm grinned. . . .

Sunday morning, as the church bells were ringing out on the peaceful air, we entered the market-place in search of an *aparejo*—a pack-saddle. The market was jammed with people making their weekly purchases, and we stopped to watch with keen interest. For anywhere in Latin America the simplest, surest way of learning the true economic condition of Pedro is to study him at his marketing.

Here, as in Puntarenas, we saw no sign of the hopeless, bitter poverty seen everywhere in Mexico. Before the little shops that lined the walls, housing saddlers and leather-workers, tobacconists, grocers and butchers, poultry dealers, wickerware vendors and makers of pottery, moved sandalled men and barefooted women, children with tiny replicas of their parents' saddle-bags, a voluble, good-humoured throng, well supplied with the colon *billetes* of the republic.

These are the richest poor people I have ever seen ; the native buys more for his easily got colon than an

American gets for five dollars. Nor need the penniless man go hungry in Costa Rica, so long as he owns or can borrow a machete. In the jungles are plantains, bananas, coco-nuts, pineapples and other fruits, while if the *mozo* has a gun, there are deer, monkeys, wild pig and feathered game galore for his hunting.

For thirty-two colones Norm produced an *aparejo* which was the Orphant Annie of packsaddles, a Miracle of Improvisation, but serviceable. By twilight it was done and we went down to *comida*, the evening meal, which had always so many courses that those beyond number six still form uncharted ground for our appetites.

From our window in the Gran Française we commanded a magnificent vista of the Cordilleras, the steep scarps of which almost encircle the capital. There was a bird's-eye view from this window of a long, gradual slope, chequered with woodland and cultivated plain in varying shades of green, with here and there a patch of sombre brown to mark the natural hue of the earth. Jagged peaks thrust up against the horizon, their crests blanketed with masses of snowy cirrus cloud, fleecy-edged and turned to shell pink and mauve and gleaming yellow gold with the setting of the sun. Irazu, the volcano, is for ever grumbling and panting. When the cloud-curtain rolls back to expose the crater, an immense pillar of smoke and steam hangs apparently motionless above it, snow-white against a sky blue as that of Naples.

On Monday afternoon we shipped our civilized garb to San José de Guatemala, then gathered our outfit about us on the floor of our room and packed clothing, cooking utensils, film-rolls and cartridges into two canvas dunnage bags. The morrow would see us



POLICE BRIGADE, PUNTARENAS.



SAYING GOOD-BYE TO MR. CHASE, SAN JOSÉ.



heading north'ard; neither of us knew what waited around the first crook of the trail. So we whistled contentedly as we lashed tight the mouths of the bags and crawled beneath our blankets at ten o'clock. "Something lost behind the ranges . . ."

Our single-girthed stock-saddles had been equipped with the cruppers universally used in Central America, where much mountain work is expected of horses. So, upon arrival at the stable at dawn, we had only to saddle up, cinch the *aparejo* across Blanco's sagging spine and diamond-hitch the pack upon it. We prodded Blanco forward and clattered out and down the cobbled street, with a shouting train of small boys accompanying, led by our faithful friend, the "King of the Boot-blacks."

"Where's your guide?" inquired Mr. Chase, when we halted before the Consulate to bid him good-bye.

"Don't want to be bothered with one. We'll ask the way," grinned Norm.

He threw up his hands in resignation.

"Well," he told us, "I'll be looking for an 'S.O.S.' from two babes in the wood by day after to-morrow. They'll surely be shipwrecked by that time."

Once upon the broad savannah beyond the town the "first day out" troubles commenced. Edna, the red mare, was possessed of seventy-seven devils of perversity, and Norm's mount, also, had been rejuvenated by his vacation in the stable. When I heard long, lurid sentences ending with "Victor," I could only surmise that the big grey reminded my *compañero* of someone he had known, but had failed to love.

Blanco was loath to start a-travelling; we must secure him by the lead-rope to a saddle horn, while one of us followed wielding a quirt. Under such coercion



did he permit himself, though with many bubbling, camel-like groans, to be dragged a-spraddle over the sunny face of Costa Rica.

At noon we came to a fork in the trail, a noble fork of four tines. Since trails down there lead usually in the most unlikely directions, we paused for language. Blanco utilized the halt to rub his pack askew against a thorny tree, almost the first token of voluntary activity he had displayed that day. Then a passing *peon* squatted on the ground to sketch a map of the trail to Esparta, and we collected Blanco and rode on.

The way led during the afternoon through the thickly settled coffee country; little thatched huts were everywhere. Troops of half-naked and dirty children played with the dogs, the pigs and chickens in the roadway. In the fields of the coffee *fincas* women and children stripped the low trees of their red, holly-like berries and upon tarpaulins beside the road spread the coffee to dry in the sun.

Every man, woman and child we met gave us smiling *buenas tardes*—good afternoon—as we passed. We were to find this courtesy to wayfarers universal throughout Costa Rica; natives of high and low degree alike greeted us with smile and word as we overtook them on the trails.

Sunset came as we rode through San Antonio, a tiny whitewashed hamlet; a riot of brazen clouds, lined with silver and old rose and lavender, fading to an opalescent haze upon the mountains; then the finger-nail moon shone high above our heads. We jogged on silently for an hour, then pitched camp beside the road and built a tiny fire. On such occasions, never a flower I have known can match fragrance with the odour of sizzling bacon, browning flapjacks and boiling coffee.

When we were sure we could eat no more, we stretched upon blankets and fell asleep between sentences.

Breakfast was finished in the grey dawn and seven o'clock saw us on the trail, pointing north. Just beyond the camp-site was a network of trails leading in every conceivable direction, but the sole resident of a near-by hut, a jovial, one-legged *peon*, was not content to give verbal directions. He saddled a tiny grey pony and rode with us for a couple of miles until we were upon the straight road.

Coffee *fincas* and banana patches we soon left behind ; the table-land formed a pleasant, rolling country well wooded and dotted with fat cattle and horses. Houses were not so close together, but we met many horsemen who eyed our Texas saddles curiously, and black-haired, buxom women and girls striding along with great earthen jars upon their heads, bearing home water from the nearest stream. These gave us shy smiles and murmured " 'Dios, señores.' " Occasionally there approached a troop of shouting boys driving a squealing piglet by ropes attached to its hind legs.

Bamboo bars replaced gates in this region ; the walls of the smaller cabins were also of this material. Huge clumps of the graceful plant creaked in the breeze beside the trail. The sun was pleasantly warm upon our backs, but the high wind of the plateau kept sombreros tugging at chin-straps.

We halted at noon beside a brawling mountain brook and unsaddled the stock. Here we had our *almuerzo* of bacon and flapjacks and coffee, while the animals devoured a huge ration of maize-ears secured from a near-by cabin. A friendly, curious *mozo* drifted down to camp to talk shyly and insisted upon helping us saddle the stock.

In early afternoon the table-land ended. The trail wound down into the valley of the Rio Grande, where an ancient, well-built stone causeway spanned the river. Beyond the bridge the way zigzagged upward again, straight toward the mountain-top. With numerous halts to permit the weary animals to breathe, we ascended the slopes and came shortly before sunset into thickly settled coffee-land once more.

Atenas was our goal. We ambled into the long main street through the twilight, past rows of low, white-washed buildings, until we came to the plaza and the church. We had decided, in the interests of speed and convenience, to jettison Blanco here, with such equipment as could not be carried in saddle-bags. So horse and surplus outfit were disposed of to a store-keeper at a small profit. We retained a hundred rounds of revolver ammunition apiece, the kodak and films and personal equipment.

An old crone agreed to give us *comida*—fried eggs, rice, black beans and *café negro*—and to supply cots. We ate, then strolled about the town with the store-keeper, who had just returned from New Orleans to apply American methods to his home-town. There was little to see; the usual couples promenading aimlessly; so we bought woven-grass *alforjas* and went back to our cots in the house of the old woman.

We rode out of Atenas at dawn and commenced descending a long, extremely crooked trail which rejoiced in the title of "El Camino Real" (the "Royal Highway"). It led down the mountain-side in many a loop and curve toward San Mateo and Esparta, past virgin tracts of many miles' width, where wild animals crashed off at our approach and birds sang from every treetop.





OLD ENGLISH WATERWHEEL, AGUACATE GOLD MINE.



Great, grey Costa Rican jays and tiny banana birds fluttered across the open before us and scolded from the thickets. High overhead the *zopilotes*—cousins of the turkey-buzzard—hovered almost motionless against the blue sky-arch, now and then descending in slow, stately spirals to the river thousands of feet below them. Presently we could look down a wooded gorge and catch a glimpse of the Gulf of Nicoya glinting steely-grey through a rift in the trees, with the faint smoke of Puntarenas in the far distance, sixty-odd miles away.

By noontide we had reached the hamlet of Desmonte, and here we breakfasted in the largest of the village's three houses. An unusually tidy woman set out the inevitable rice and black beans, eggs and fried bananas. Then we continued the descent of the rocky trail, down which the animals slipped and slid, literally inch by inch. High above Desmonte a bridlepath turned between two crumbling brick pillars and ascended the mountain-side to the ancient Aguacate Gold Mine, oldest in Central America.

From the cyanide plant in a little valley writhed and twisted an insane path almost impassable to horses. We were forced to dismount and drive the animals before us, and when we reached the summit men and horses alike were soaked and breathless.

At the office of the *mina* manager and auditor made us welcome, and after dinner that evening, as we lounged on the verandah overlooking the miners' village, they regaled us with many tales of snakes, and native superstitions. When they were done I told them that, were I ever asked my opinion on the reptile life of Costa Rica, I must reply that I believed the republic infested by the most venomous, deadly species

of snake *stories* I had ever encountered. Then a "galvanized" ("civilized") native clerk eyed me oddly. He spoke English, had lived in the States, but the superstitions of his fathers still gripped him.

"Ah, you don't believe our tales, Mister Macho," he said. "You make the fun now, but, Santa Maria! one morning you may wake to find a *toboba* staring you in the face with wicked eyes. *Then* you will believe. Ha! It is not well to make the funniness with Señor Toboba. *Por Dios!* I say no!"

He was very serious and we all laughed. I told him that I felt no premonitory shivers, but a few weeks later . . .

We were shown to a bedroom in the auditor's house and knew the comfort of a modern bathroom in that wild mountain land. As we fell asleep there rose in the quiet air a burst of yelling from the village; the miners were enjoying a wake.

As the clock in the dilapidated old church struck eleven, we trotted briskly through San Mateo and rode on into the open country beyond, now a-dance with heat haze through which the chalky road shimmered like a band of white-hot metal. An old woman beside the road sold us breakfast for a colon a head, while her brood of staring children first fed the horses, then returned to watch us open-mouthed.

The trail traversed the same wooded country as in the morning. All the mountain-trails were narrow cañons cut deep into the land by the wheels of the ox-carts, floored either with great, loose stones or solid rock. Occasionally, at the bottom of some valley, was a brief stretch of soft, red dust, where the only sound to break the sleepy hush of mid-afternoon was the pad-pad of the horses' hoofs, the creaking of stirrup

leathers and the pleasant, drowsy jingle of spur chains.

We came to a pleasantly shaded spot and halted beneath the branches of a great matapala to breathe the animals. Beneath the tree a motley company was already seated, men and women and children, with a keenness, an alertness of expression, about them that made them subtly different from the smiling natives we had met on the trail theretofore. They leaned upon oddly shaped bundles and one boy sat unafraid beside a big jaguar.

Our frank stares were returned for a bit, then an elderly man smiled upon us and explained that they were a troupe of entertainers who travelled from town to town, wherever a *fiesta* was held. In this troop were jugglers and sleight-of-hand performers, acrobats and even a few exponents of the Central American interpretation of the ancient shell-and-pea swindle. Chatting with them we got a reminiscent whiff of our own circuses in the flavour of their talk.

Two boys brought up a *marimba*, the lineal ancestor of the xylophone of our jazz bands, and tapped out a mournful, monotonous refrain that set Edna's hoofs moving restlessly. Then we mounted and rode on, followed by their *au revours*.

"*Hasta Esparta!*" they cried after us—"Until Esparta!"

Near Esparta the wooded hills gave way to long green stretches of level pasture land, with herds of cattle and horses cropping the lush grass as far as the eye could reach. From his feeding beneath a roble bush, a donkey, the first we had seen in Costa Rica, trumpeted at us as we passed.

There was ever an atmosphere of quaintness about



these peaceful little towns. I felt somehow as if we rode, not merely through the drowsy country-side, but back through Time itself, to approach them. They were like the hamlets of medieval Spain, the Spain of *Gil Blas* and *Don Quixote*, with hardly a modern touch about their low, white houses and tiny shops, or about the people lazing on the narrow streets.

Swart, sandalled men on horse- or mule-back gave grave salutation, as they passed, to women and girls whose heads were shrouded with the black *mantilla* of Old Castile; the village inn was still the centre of news for the region. It always woke an odd feeling of unreality to address these folk with words gleaned from textbooks of the prosaic States and, listening, find that I could understand their replies.

Such a town was Atenas, and Esparta was the same, with never an automobile, nor a wagon which in model was later than, perhaps, three hundred years past. There were only the carts, their wooden wheels sawed from a single section of a huge tree, creaking past on ungreased pole axles in the wake of placid-eyed, slow-moving spotted oxen.

When the animals had been unsaddled and fed in a *potrero*—pasture—we turned to the principal inn, crowded with country-folk come in to attend the *Fiesta Unionista*. We ate in the low-ceiled public dining-room with horse-dealers and farmers staring at us curiously, and a fat little Indian maid flirting brazenly with Norm. When the dusk had fallen the streets began to fill, moving toward the stone-floored market.

Here the dance was in full swing. There was "music" galore—brass bands, string orchestras and *marimba* players, each striving to outdo all others in violence of gesture and volume of sound. The *peones* for miles

around had taken holiday and come in to drink *aguardiente* and dance with their giggling *niñas*. Everyone seemed to be enjoying the festival with the abandon of a people which knows but few amusements.

Outside the market, under flaring, guttering carbide lamps, we found the mountebanks we had met in the afternoon on the trail. Groups of natives gathered about the jugglers and acrobats, or gasped in amazement when the lifted shell disclosed no pea. It was for all the world like circus-night in any small town of the States, then . . .

A wild, hair-raising scream went up behind us. We whirled to see a boy of seventeen or so leap forward and swing his machete murderously at a be-mustachioed *hombre* who was springing backward as he tugged at his own machete-handle. The boy's razor-edged blade gashed across the shirt-bosom of Señor Mustachio from side to side, leaving a thin line of red, then a squad of little policemen disarmed them. Sudden death, I reflected, lay rather close to the surface in these smiling, brown men, when the fiery *aguardiente* or "*guaro*"—the colourless rum distilled from sugarcane sap—tilted their peaceful brains. We went back to the dance-floor, to watch these swarthy descendants of the Mayas slapping broad bare feet upon the stone pavement.

When we found our room, with the aid of a flickering carbide lamp, we thought for the moment we had reached the stables. It was one of a single row of stalls equipped with rude cots, each pigeonhole opening upon the dusty, weed-bordered *Calle Principal*. Down "*Main Street*" wandered, for the better part of the night, groups of yelling, singing "*hombres de bien*," much the worse for *guaro*. Sleep was fitful.

The trail out of Esparta was smoother than any we

had seen thus far and the drifting clouds afforded grateful relief from the sun. We jogged along over a gently rolling country, sometimes bathed in brilliant sunshine, again shrouded by a soft greyness like that of twilight, while a tiny breeze fanned the long grass.

Through wooded prairies the trail led to the Rio Barranca, and we crossed over the planks set between the tracks of the railway bridge and trotted into Miramar, a thriving, helter-skelter town of five hundred souls, at midday. An old woman sold us our meal, and we ate in the open verandah of her whitewashed *casa*, with the hens and the family cat seeking crumbs at our feet, while the old dame smiled toothlessly upon us from the kitchen doorway. The strong north wind threatened to whip the dishes from the table, and our hostess sniffed sailor-fashion into the breeze and predicted rain.

When we paid our score of one colon and saddled the animals, the old woman called us to the verandah and filled our pockets with greenish fruit from her orange tree. Las Juntas, she said, was but three hours' ride and the trail was plain. We halted at a tiny shop on the town's outskirts and inquired of a round-eyed *muchacho* which of the forking trails led to Las Juntas. He stared at us blankly for a space, withdrew a forefinger from his mouth just long enough to point, then clapped the finger back.

Three o'clock found us still on the trail in a mountainous, densely wooded region and at the summit of a hill so steep we had been forced to walk behind the lagging animals and drive them upward with the quirt. But once upon the hilltop the swearing, sweating ascent was rewarded by a wonderful panorama of the country below, where the sugarcane showed in light-green



squares against the darker verdure of the mountain-side and the grey surface of Nicoya shone like a silver shield for background.

As we halted here an ancient *hombre* astride a shaggy, cock-eared mountain pony trotted around a bend in the trail, with a second, even smaller pony following meekly behind bearing two huge boxes lashed to a rude pack-saddle. The old man stopped beside us to point out those scenes he conceived might be of interest to *touristas*, then shook hands very solemnly and ambled on. This business of shaking hands seems to be a family weakness of the Costaricense; few we met could resist the temptation.

In late afternoon we literally slid down to a noisy mountain stream which crossed the trail. In Costa Rica all streams cross the roads; this is a peculiarity I make no effort to explain, but set it down as statistical. At the ford we found a group of *peones* watering their scrubby ponies with much splashing and laughter. Here we learned that the small boy who had directed us out of Miramar will undoubtedly father a generation of soulful liars, if there is anything in the theory of hereditary influence; we were on the trail to La Union Mine, not on that to Las Juntas.

A thunderstorm was gathering far up the valley into which we were descending by inches; a huge pall of inky nimbus cloud shrouded the sky overhead. As we followed the serpentine trail to the mine a fine drizzle began to fall, then a steady rain. We huddled in the saddle and faced the slanting wet, wondering to see such a downpour in the dry season. Also, we acknowledged the ability of the old woman to forecast weather.

The horses puffed and slid over the slippery mud,

but still we could see no sign of human habitation. An hour passed, then, far below us, a gleam of ghostly white on the green valley-floor showed the mine-buildings. The weary animals lifted up their heads and sniffed, then broke into a jarring trot.

At the mine-office we were welcomed with true Cost Rican hospitality by the manager, Don Juan Matamoras. A *mozo* led off the animals to the stable, then brought our saddles and *alforjas* uphill to the owner's empty house, where we had been assigned an immense bedroom.

After dinner we sat comfortably in the manager's bungalow, listening to the beat of the rain upon the shingles. Once more we saw the Book of the Tropics opened and, with cigarettes red-ended, leaned back comfortably to hear of men and affairs "sub lotus." Matamoras, who had seen the jaded animals, presented us with the premises. A two-day halt, he told us, would rest the horses, and give us time to wander through the mine. We accepted gratefully, for the entertainment was pleasant, made an appointment for dawn, then stumbled sleepily up to our room in the big house on the hilltop.

## CHAPTER II

### JOGGING THROUGH THE FOOTHILLS

LA UNION GOLD MINE—A MULE FOR A HORSE—CROSSING "MONKEY FORD"—AT THE RIO GUASIMAL—TWISTING TRAILS—A CHINESE PIRATE—LAS JUNTAS AND THE TERRIBLE TURK—TRAIL TO LAS CAÑAS—THE POLICEMAN'S STATISTICS—WHAT THE RATS DID.

THE house of the mine-owner, used by him during his infrequent visits to La Union, which was only one of his properties in the republic, was a square building of two stories, with verandahs on both floors at front and back. All in all, it comprised twelve great rooms, one of which contained us, with two canvas cots and the little pile of our saddles and outfit, with still an effect of yawning emptiness.

There were all the creakings and groanings that mark the uninhabited house in any land, plainly audible above the drumming of the rain upon the shingles over our heads. One sound in particular came to us—a creak as of the screened door to the lower front verandah being opened cautiously; a soft shuffling, when I would have sworn that sandalled feet were crossing the hallway to the stairs. Silence for an instant, then the same shuffling footsteps in diminuendo, with the rusty creaking of the door hinges as it opened and closed again. Five times I lay and listened to the whole programme, in not more than twenty minutes by Norm's watch. Then, as I was trying to gather

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energy to go downstairs and see if the door was hooked as we had left it, I fell asleep.

The seven-o'clock whistle waked us to a grey, watery dawn. We scrambled out of the blankets and dived under an icy shower in the bathroom, and just as the last *peon* straggled past the foreman at the shaft-mouth up the hill, we were entering the bungalow of Don Juan Matamoras, very ready to discuss breakfast, or "*desayuno*," as the Latinized races term the morning meal.

Maynor, whose knowledge of mining was as theoretical as our own, was to be our guide, for Don Juan was a very busy man, who must personally supervise the progress in a dozen separated sections of the workings. All in our very dirtiest clothing, as we had been instructed to come, we followed the secretary through the cluster of storehouses and assay offices set in the valley-bottom and climbed a narrow, tortuous path up through the undergrowth on the hill-side.

A little, whitewashed shed clung to a square platform hewed out of the hill-side, with greenery all around and above it, threatening to swallow up the shack in a sudden final wave of growth. Here was the yawning black shaft-mouth, main entrance to the mine. A blank-faced Chinese storekeeper brought out carbide lamps, similar to those used on bicycles, from the store-shed, and we went inside the shaft.

La Union is a "tunnel" mine; the shaft is horizontal instead of perpendicular, so there is no hoisting necessary, except for short heights in the lower levels of the mine itself. The main-shaft is drilled from a point on the curving hillside, straight into the mountain. The tunnels, roughly six feet wide and as many high, are like the hallways of a great skyscraper, radiating

at angles from the main-shaft, with corresponding "floors" of tunnels above and below the main-level, each carrying its system of narrow ore-car tracks, in regular "stories."

A narrow plank was set upon the rock-floor between the ore-car tracks, to serve as walk. Along this we went gingerly, into the slimy-walled, slushy-floored tunnel leading past the wing where were the old workings of a half-century before. We stopped at the mouth of the tunnel leading into these workings of another generation, and Maynor—bolder than we—picked his way through ankle-deep muddy water for a hundred feet to throw his light upon the tangled mass of timbers that blocked the passage into the old unit. The shoring had given way in places and let the roof sag almost to the tunnel-floor. It was a dripping desolation that his lamp revealed, as melancholy as a drowned kitten. I wondered what it would be like to be lost in that deserted warren of crossing passages, which could be come into from the modern workings above; I hoped earnestly that Maynor was a competent guide, for the dank, chill gloom, merely intensified by the flickering glare of the torches, was having its effect.

It was easy to picture some poor devil of a *mozo*, newly arrived and so unfamiliar with the mine's geography, scrambling down a "chimney" from the new workings and becoming confused in the labyrinthine twistings of the old works; running up and down the endless passages, screaming with the fear of the dark that is so strong in all of us; dying of hunger and exhaustion—there was drip-water and to spare—perhaps, on the slimy mud of the floor. But Maynor shrugged cheerfully when I broached the question.

"Very seldom," he answered. "Occasionally a man



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disappears, of course, in spite of the checking-system at the shaft-mouth. The devil of it is, we can't tell whether he's just skipped with a shirtful of high-grade and left the region, or is really lost somewhere in the out-lying tunnels. It hasn't happened since I've been here."

Far down the main-tunnel a light came flickering toward us. We were joined by a craggy-featured, seamed and stooping old mine-boss. He had spent more than fifteen of the past twenty-five years in burrowing mole-like underground, he told us, and had worked in the mines from Mexico to Peru. Of the ten years he hadn't been mining, nearly eight had been employed in recovering from rheumatism. We saw that he moved with the deft certainty of the blind in the dank blackness, carrying his lamp carelessly as if more from habit than any real need of it.

He preceded us down a "chimney," a narrow, vertical shaft leading to the level, or floor, a hundred feet directly below that in which he had joined us. We elevated our arms to the perpendicular and with groping feet searched out the wooden ladder-rungs. The chimney was so narrow that it was impossible to alter the position of one's arms until the bottom was reached—very thankfully on my part—ten minutes later.

Still following the boss, we waded ankle-deep in icy seepage-water down a seemingly endless tunnel, cut into other cross-tunnels to left and right until all sense of direction left me, ascended a short chimney and followed another system of passages, hugging the walls at frequent intervals to let the rumbling, heavy-burdened ore-cars go by with their cargo of bluish-white mud. At last we came to the new stope where a pocket of rich ore had just been found.

At the end of this stope two native miners were at

work with airdrill and short picks, grubbing out ore from the vein. They had no light except that from a stump of tallow candle, which barely illumined the grey wall upon which they worked. Both wore their battered straw hats, but nothing else except "shorts" made by chopping the legs from old trousers, and cowhide sandals so mud-incrusted that their identity was almost indeterminate.

They were short, broad men, like most Costaricensens, all muscular arms and shoulders and deep chest, with no legs to speak of, like professional boxers. The rays of our lamps glared white on their eyeballs as they turned curiously to look at us, and threw the sides of their swarthy faces into quick relief as they held drill to vein, or swung the picks with short, grunting strokes upon quartz and clay.

The big back-muscles slid like snakes under the brown skin, and the beads of perspiration on their smooth trunks winked and twinkled like diamond-facets against the surrounding wall of blackness.

We were invited to pick up specimens from this spot, where the gold- and silver-bearing quartz assayed more than sixty dollars to the ton, in contrast to the ten-dollar ore which had always been the average of La Union. But there was nothing about the whitey-brown rock to tell the story of golden treasure to our inexperienced eyes. It looked like any other muddy rock.

We found it all vastly interesting, this labour of extracting from the very bowels of the earth the yellow and white metals for which all of us, in one way or another, scramble and fight. But as I looked at the faces and figures of the miners we met in the levels, particularly at the old Swede mine-boss, who was as ignorant of anything outside his tunnels as any ten-

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year-old schoolboy, it seemed to me that a mark of abnormality was set upon them all, apart from the owlsh, peering eyes, the set stoop of the shoulders that comes from ducking and crawling down low passage-ways. Thought of the consequence of even a small earthquake was far from pleasant ; I remembered with painful distinctness that several slight tremors had been felt within the past two weeks. So it was with hearty relief that I turned back with the others to the shaft-mouth, after four hours underground, and stood once more under the clear blue sky, in brilliant sunlight.

From down the valley came the thud-thudding of the stamp-mill, where the ore taken from the mine went beneath the great stamps and emerged as liquid. After a cocktail-shaking process this liquid, of much the colour and smell as plaster, ran on to zinc platforms and, mixed with water, travelled on to others. Gravity did all the carrying ; from stamp-mill to cyanide-plant the solution came downhill—a common arrangement in all mines, we were told.

In the cyanide-plant we were shown the last stages of extraction ; a series of great tubs in which the solution in varying degrees of fineness stood for days to “ settle,” so that the “ values ” could be extracted. From the last of these tubs came the values to be precipitated, and finally cast into bars for shipment. San José was the destination of the bars, and they went out under heavy guard.

Victor had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Under Norm’s poundage he was too soft of constitution, too long in the barrel, for the difficult mountain-work that lay before us. So when we had finished breakfast Don Juan called in Arturo Brioschi, the Italian stableman, who had a *macho* for sale.





ARTURO PRIOSCHI, THE HORSE-TRADER,  
LA UNION,



SHY MUCHACHO AND SILVER DOG, TRAIL  
TO ATENAS.



Arturo had fallen in love with Victor at first sight, for the big grey was a showy horse. In turn, we coveted the big, sturdy *macho*. But when we set a price of colones one hundred in addition to the *macho* as our valuation of Victor, Arturo withdrew hurriedly and offendedly from the conference, shaking his head and muttering that in the past ten years he hadn't seen so much money. He was called the shrewdest horse-trader in the republic, so we waited curiously for his counter-offer of the morrow. Knowing Victor's shortcomings, we were perfectly willing, even anxious, to trade, but we wanted, also, to make Arturo pay something—anything—against his will.

After breakfast the next morning we inspected the *mula* of one of the workers in the cyanide-plant. Levy demanded two hundred colones, in addition to Victor, for his animal, which we regarded as an outrageous price. I explained to him that we hadn't come to Costa Rica to make all the inhabitants independently wealthy, while Norm ostentatiously inspected the animal's ears and teeth, and when Levy demanded the reason, explained blandly that he was looking for the diamond-settings. So Levy departed.

Next came Arturo with his *macho*, a fat, strong animal of some twelve or twenty years' wisdom and experience, dependent entirely upon whether one hearkened to Arturo or his enemies. Arturo is well deserving of a chronicle to himself, for the account of his Machiavellian schemings, like Tennyson's brook, "runs on and on for ever."

We renewed our demand for a hundred colones boot, and again Arturo lifted up his voice with all the eloquence and fervour of his Latin forbears to protest that he hadn't so much as *cinco* centavos—five cents.

Maynor, catching sight of Arturo's wife in a doorway, suggested maliciously that Arturo should borrow the hundred from his better half, who was known to handle the purse-strings, as well as the reins of government, in the household. Arturo turned to cast one glance at the vast, uncompromising bulk of the Señora Brioschi, then yawned eloquently.

"A —— of a chance I'd have, Mr. Maynor," he replied simply. "Would *you* like to try?"

Maynor refused hastily.

We insisted that a hundred colones boot was none too much when Victor's manifest superiority was considered. Arturo sighed dolefully, then whirled upon the twinkling-eyed Don Juan and called upon all the gods to witness that he was a poor man; that, whereas the mine's owner, whose confidential groom he was, had decreed that his, Arturo's, salary and emoluments should be four colones a day, with allowance for house and food, immediately after the owner's departure for the States Don Juan had reduced his wages to three colones and cut off all allowances. So he hadn't a penny to bless himself with.

Don Juan and Maynor had warned us that in a horse-deal Arturo always won—or refused to deal—so we weren't greatly surprised when noon found us on the trail to the power-house of the Abengarez Gold Field Company, at Guasimal, with Norm astride the *macho*, and no richer in colones of the republic.

Arturo rode with us part way, to guide us through the tangled jungle surrounding La Union. He bestrode a tiny bay pony girded with an ancient Texas hull, and was armed—Arturo, not the pony—with both machete and rusty revolver to do honour to his importance. He knew the country as the Indian knows his hunting-

ground, and he rode with the careless grace of the Comanche. He led us by way of mad gallops down ten-inch bridlepaths through the dense undergrowth of the hill-sides, up sheer slopes and down breath-taking descents, until we came in mid-afternoon upon a faintly defined ox-cart trail. Here he halted and demanded my notebook and upon a page drew a map of the remainder of the route to Guasimal, giving us, as he drew, a wealth of oral information about the region and its inhabitants.

He seemed to consider the country solely in terms of horses and mules. Here, at this blaze in the trail—marked with a great X with the borrowed pencil—lived an "*hombre muy malo*" (a very bad man), who owned two horses and a *macho*; a mile beyond was an old woman with a fine mare. Arturo had the live stock of the locality catalogued in his mind, and we felt sure that, should we ever have to camp in his neighbourhood, our horses would sleep with us. We refused pointblank to purchase the little pony, so he shook hands and turned back.

For an hour we followed the cart-road through scrub jungle where never a *casa* of the humblest broke the virginal wilderness, fording innumerable narrow brooks and climbing or descending constantly. Then we came to the broad stream named by Arturo the Rio Grande, of which every *departamento*, or province, can boast at least one. This stream, so Arturo had warned us, was filled with quicksands and the only safe crossing must be made at "Vado Mono," the "Monkey Wade." We would know it, according to Arturo, by the monkeys swarming about the ford.

It was nearly twilight when we halted the animals at the brink of the ten-foot bluff which there formed



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the stream's bank, to stare dubiously across the thick, slow-moving water. The trail we stood upon apparently continued beyond the river, judging from a tiny break in the green wall on the opposite shore, but—was it Vado Mono or merely a cattle-trail? So we sat the beasts and speculated.

Then on the far bank broke out a shrill chattering. Flying through the branches of the low trees came twenty or thirty monkeys. We heaved sighs of relief and sent the animals sliding down the bluff into the water. Barely had they breasted the slow current, rising belly-high upon Edna, when downstream we saw another faint path leading into the stream and another flock of monkeys gathered. We hesitated, then Norm turned in the saddle and stared upstream. I followed the direction indicated by his pointing finger and there was a third path, with patron monkeys swinging in the branches of the trees above!

So we spurred on, and with the *macho* splashing cautiously in the lead came to midstream where the water ran swiftly, with a foaming ripple marking the true channel. The *macho* was as sure of foot as a cat, but poor Edna slipped and stumbled over the round stones and at last came to her knees and slipped sideways. I came out of the saddle with a bound and hauled the little mare to her feet. Then, wetted from neck to heels, I led her on to the shore. Apparently, we had found the true Monkey Wade, for I could feel nothing but loose stones underfoot.

"Follow the trail from the blaze on the big mata-pala," Arturo had said, in effect. But when we reached the far bank of the Rio Grande we broke through the screen of bushes and rode out into a wide stretch of jungle which had been burned over within the week by



ARTURO AND YOUNG DEER CAUGHT AT LA UNION.



TWO "MACHOS" AND EDNA, TRAIL TO GUASIMAL.





some wandering native. Of the matapala's blazed face we found no trace, and we rode up and down the bank, trying to pick up the trail. There was a half-hour of this, with the droves of black-and-tan monkeys swinging in the trees along the bank parallel to our course, making uncomplimentary remarks—judging from the expressions upon their comical, wizened faces—about our personal appearance. Parrots of all shades of green, the great, piratical-nosed, purple and scarlet macaws, and huge grey jays, flapped up from the low bushes about us, screaming raucously. Then Norm gave the *macho* his head and he broke through the trackless undergrowth and brought us to a narrow path leading upward through an aisle between great trees.

The sun set, leaving a grey haze upon the wilderness. Darkness came down with tropical suddenness and progress became a matter always difficult, sometimes dangerous, for although the moon rode high in the sky, so thick was the leafy screen above our heads that few rays filtered through to light us on the way.

Once Edna came to her knees at the crest of a long, steep hill and I, alighting very suddenly, almost stepped over a precipice whose height I could only guess. Again she slipped downward through thick dust with feet bunched cat-fashion, and I reached above my head to grasp a vine sharply outlined against the moonlit sky that roofed the little clearing. But the "vine" writhed upward from my hand and I ducked hurriedly with crawling spine, expecting to feel fangs striking into the back of my neck. Ahead of us the *macho* was picking his way placidly over the loose stones at a pace Edna made no attempt to equal.

Owls hooted in the darkness around us and low-flying birds fluttered across the way with drowsy chirps,

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almost in our faces. We came to a narrow stream of which we had heard Maynor speak, and within a half-hour crossed it splashingly no less than thirteen times, the animals stumbling over the sharp stones of the fords. At last, just as we were becoming reconciled to the thought of a blanket in the jungle for bed, a stalk of sugarcane for *comida*, electric lights twinkled in the darkness before us and we rode out into open country. A half-mile more and we crossed a causeway made by filling in with dirt the ten-foot space between two huge waterpipes.

With both Edna and the *macho* rearing and plunging where the causeway bridged the Rio Guasimal—eighty feet below—we came to the power-house at Guasimal, and at ten-thirty were given a huge meal of beefsteaks, beans, boiled rice, coffee with both canned milk and white sugar. Then we fell across canvas cots and were asleep almost before the big, courteous Spaniard of the house had left the room.

Our way onward from Guasimal led along the Abengarez intake, a huge concrete flume down which flow the icy, crystal-clear waters of the Rio Guasimal. We ate an enormous breakfast, caught the animals and saddled them, and paid our hostess two colones for meals and lodging.

The grass along the intake was green and thick and the call of running water too strong to be denied. We stripped and plunged into the stream, while the animals grazed near-by. The *macho* grazed on the grass near the water, and somehow, faced by his expression of age-old wisdom, we felt painfully young and guileless, spite our combined experience of nearly sixty years.

So, standing erect and shivering in the icy water, we christened him Solomon the King. Never did we have

reason to regret our choice of names, whatever else about him gave us sorrow in the days that followed.

After leaving the intake the trail wound upward through the mountains over a tortuous, ill-defined way—as usual. Occasionally we passed the rude cabin of some small cultivator, set in an emerald patch of sugarcane or plantains, but for the most part unbroken wilderness lay on either hand. We levied on the roadside fields and rode with four-foot stalks of sugarcane set like flutes at our lips.

At noon we found we were off the trail, and after vain attempts to discover the road to Las Juntas by the directions of passers-by—one such trail leading for a mile up an almost sheer slope, where we stumbled through a network of vines behind the panting animals and drove them upward with quirt and word—we halted at a large white house and requisitioned breakfast.

A young *peon* at this hacienda volunteered to saddle up and put us on the road to Abengarez Gold Field and Las Juntas, and when we promised him a colon for the service he became an animated smile. He brought us the greenish *naranjas* (oranges) of the country as we sat in the shade of the verandah waiting for breakfast, and hung about generally as if afraid we might reconsider the offer and decamp without employing him.

When we had eaten our meal of fried eggs, beans, *tortillas* and new-made cheese, and drunk a steaming cupful of black coffee each, we paid the score of “un colon” to the woman of the house and followed the young *peon* back along the way we had come in the forenoon.

Our guide, machete at his side, dressed in clean blue pyjama-suit, rode a tough little white mare for whose

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unshod hoofs no slope seemed too difficult. Her colt, a slim buckskin beauty, scampered along at her heels, while her master asked me the names of countless articles in "Inglés," repeating the words after me over and over, until he had memorized them.

Near twilight we came back to the entrance of the road to Las Juntas. It was a bare mile from our lodging-place of the night before and was gained by passing through the barred gate of a farmer and crossing his *potrero*, or pasture. Since Las Juntas was five hours' ride distant and the stock very weary, we turned back to the Company house and unsaddled in the doorway.

Here a young *mozo*—Rafael Arroyo by name—inquired, in halting English, "what we *now* desired of the people of this house." When we explained our plight, all were most hospitable; the women brought out a decanter of *guaro* and filled cups for us. One swallow, taken for courtesy's sake, was my limit; the liquor blazed a smoking trail down my gullet and sent me, tearful-eyed and gasping, to the water-jar.

After *comida* we held English lessons for Rafael's benefit, with the man of the house, the big, courteous Spaniard we had met the night before, an interested listener. Then some boys came drifting through the dusk, with guitars made of the bastard mahogany of the country. They played a weird, native foxtrot and we danced with booted feet upon the rough verandah with the barefooted wife of the Spanish engineer. Rafael, who seemed to be a sort of man-of-all-work about the place, volunteered to accompany us to Las Juntas and Don Pelaya; his "*jefe*" (boss) told him to take an ancient white *mula* for the journey. We were shown to the room we had slept in the night



before and fell asleep to the distant jangle of the guitars, as the boys strolled homeward in the white moonlight.

Rafael was late next morning. The white *mula*—having evidently heard our conversation the night before—hid away and must be pursued throughout the *potrero*. But we were gone before nine, straight up the side of a mountain, as is usual in Costa Rica.

It was a "scenic" morning. With Rafael jogging at my stirrup on his bare-backed white *mula*, we rode over mountains and through pleasant, shady valleys where the feet of the animals scuffed through the thick carpet of dead leaves fallen from the great trees that towered high above our heads. All about us were the pink, peach-blossomy blooms of the *roble de sabana* (oak of the plain) and countless other flowering shrubs the names of which Rafael gave me in exchange for English words, but for which I know no equivalents. Over us always was the serene blue sky of the tropics, flecked with drifting cirrus clouds of creamy white; the warm, scented air was perceptible as incense in a temple.

Through wildernesses of the blossoming shrubs we came, across mountain brooks where whole families stood, stark-naked and naïvely heedless of the condition, at their bath, huge gourds in their hands, intent upon watching us pass, down giddy slopes where the inclines held us breathless and we leaned back at an acute angle to the saddle, our toes at the animals' cheeks; until early in the afternoon we rode out of the jungle into a land of level, sun-scorched, dreary plain, like the alkali wastes of Texas or New Mexico. At one-thirty we jogged into the hamlet of San Juan.

Here, in the kitchen of a Chinese storekeeper, we were given breakfast—the inevitable fried eggs, black beans,



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rice and *café negro*. The coffee was so black and so strong that it stained our khaki trousers irreparably wherever a drop fell upon them, and it must inevitably have eaten away the lining of our stomachs had we not been perspiring so freely.

Rafael ate like one unaccustomed to such plenty—we had stopped at his bare little cabin that morning for a stirrup-cup, and his larder looked slim—and we weren't far behind him in the amount of food consumed.

When we came to pay the Chinese bandit—a worthy descendant of Yang-tze pirates—he stared at his fingernails and murmured blandly, “*Cuatro colones y media, caballeros.*” We protested, both Rafael and I outdoing ourselves in volume of eloquence, that four and a half colones was an exorbitant charge for an ordinary meal for three. We called him a *ladron grande*—a great thief—without trace of shame or decency.

But it was all to no effect. We had eaten his food and it was for him to decide its value. A scrubby little policeman beside the Chinaman—nibbling busily at a banana from the Chinaman's stock—began to explain that it was but a fair price, since we had “insisted upon eating and had put the cook to much trouble.” Norm whirled upon the limb of the law—too evidently suborned by the Celestial—with such an emphatic “Shut up!” that the meaning, if not the words, was unmistakable. The police force of San Juan betook itself, banana and all, in search of other affairs.

We paid the extortion and Rafael kicked the Chinaman's dog, so we felt somewhat compensated. But thereafter, we resolved, we would know the price of a Chinaman's goods before purchasing.

In mid-afternoon we trotted into sleepy little Las Juntas, having skirted the edge of the mining-camp at

Abengarez, the largest group of mines in Central America. Las Juntas, a clutter of wattled huts and adobe houses asprawl upon the flat, sun-baked prairie, hardly raised its eyes as we rode in. But Rafael, by dint of a house-to-house canvas, found one ancient crone who owned a *potrero* where we might pasture the animals, and another who would serve us food. But for beds we must depend upon Don Salomon Chajud, the Turkish storekeeper. Don Salomon was absent in the country, but would return by dusk.

We presented Rafael with a gratuity, which he accepted unwillingly, protesting that his services had been given freely and without thought of reward. I promised to send him an English-Spanish dictionary and grammar from the States, and immediately he tried to force back upon me the *billete* we had had so much difficulty in persuading him to take. He said good-bye almost tearfully, and rode with his chin on his shoulder until the road disappeared behind the houses on the outskirts of the village. A better guide we had never seen, we decided, as we watched the old white *mula* and her stocky, bowlegged rider go back toward Guasimal.

As we sat in the verandah of Chajud's *tienda* a yellow *chucho* galloped from the interior of a hut across the way, followed by loud imprecations from a fat, barefooted Amazon. The cur dragged a square of fresh cowhide behind him in his flight, and before he had gone twenty jumps a cloud of *zopilotes* swooped down upon him from what had seemed a clear sky, struggling to wrest away his prize. Time after time the big, rusty-feathered birds lifted both hide and cur from the ground, the *chucho* clinging grimly to his trove. But at last, like his ancestor of the fable, the dog released his grip to rescue a smaller piece torn from the hide and so lost all.

As Norm snatched the kodak and trained it on the scene, appeared the town drunkard, who couldn't understand our interest in a common cur when he and his dog were on the ground, willing, even anxious, to be photographed. He insisted upon interposing his *guaro*-laden bulk between lens and *zopilotes*, until a forcible remonstrance sent him permanently to the background.

The entire population of Las Juntas appeared magically upon first glimpse of the kodak. They gathered about Norm in fascinated circle, and one of the clerks in Don Salomon's store rushed out with a group of children to be pictured. Their eagerness to have their likeness recorded, even though I explained that we couldn't develop the pictures there, was rather embarrassing, and reminded me of a Costa Rican proverb which runs to the effect that the Costaricense will halt a revolution or a wedding to have his portrait made. We solved the problem in Las Juntas by standing them up in groups, while Norm trained the kodak upon them and, with much gesturing, gravely clicked tongue against teeth to produce the sound of the snapping shutter. Then everyone was happy.

The mail came jingling in as we waited for Don Salomon, a *Gil Blas*-ish procession of six big pack-mules bearing the leather mail-bags, the train escorted by three horsemen armed to the teeth as guard against bandits, who not infrequently, we were told, rifled the mail-sacks. The train jingled up to the verandah, followed by all the small boys of the town, tossed down a mail-bag and trotted on.

We went to *comida*, served upon an unpainted mahogany table in the open space between kitchen and living-room of a little hut near the river. As usual, the hens, their chicks, the dogs, cats and pigs sat down to meat

with us. But the old woman was clean, her coffee was good, and she charged us only the regulation half-colon per head which all *touristas* are expected to pay cheerfully. When we informed her that we would require *desayuno* the next morning, her smile deepened. For a fleeting instant I thought she intended to reduce the charge for our *comida*. But, as usual in such cases, I was mistaken; she merely replied that we might eat at seven in the morning.

When we got back to the store Don Salomon stood in the doorway pulling at his moustache. He was the town's big man, both physically and otherwise. Capitalist, money-lender, storekeeper, undertaker, horse-dealer, innkeeper—he dabbled in anything that promised profit and held it to its promise. He was a Turk without a drop of any other blood in his veins, he boasted, a paunchy, heavy-faced man with blue-black mustachios and little sharp black eyes. He agreed to furnish us beds, and when darkness fell escorted us to a rickety annex adjoining the store.

Our room was above the establishment of an old negro shoemaker and our slumbers were consequently disturbed until midnight by the tap-tapping of hammer on last. Then, some two hours later, we were aroused by the scream of the high, gusty night-wind of the Guanacaste Peninsula, which threatened to tear the tin roof from the building. It was pleasant to be sheltered on such a night; we burrowed thankfully into the blankets and fell asleep again while the wind shrieked outside.

It was pig-sticking time in Las Juntas. An agonized squeal waked us in the grey dawn, and we looked down into the back yard upon a doomed porker triced up for butchering. When we went to the old woman's cabin



for breakfast we found the men of her household busily scraping a fat hog outside the kitchen door.

Back at the store we found ourselves confronted by the ancient wile practised upon new-comers in the *pais*. The small boy sent by Don Salomon to the *potrero* for our stock returned with the news that they were "gone."

Jerry Kingsbury had warned us about this trick, so when we heard the *muchacho's* report we donned six-shooters and grim, threatening expressions, then led that boy back to the pasture. I informed him as impressively as possible that his sole interest in life had best be the locating of our animals, and after a sullen glance at the big revolvers he dived into the brush, to reappear within three minutes astride Edna and leading Solomon.

Had we permitted the game to reach its customary dénouement, we should have accepted the boy's statement as fact, hired horses from Chajud—at extortionate rates—and a *mozo* to ride with us and bring them back. Then, at the next town, a telegram would have informed us that our stock had been "found" and would be delivered *if* we paid a reward to the finder and recompensed another man for the time spent in delivering them to us.

We saddled in silence—toward the onlookers on Chajud's verandah, at least, for our language between ourselves was quite fluent—and Don Salomon Chajud came forward to collect for the various services rendered during our stay in Las Juntas. We made him cool his heels, for that hurt his dignity, while we treated the animals' ears with *carbolina* to rid them of the *garrapatas* (wood-ticks) which infest the skins of all animals let out to graze in Central American *potreros*.

The *garrapata*, incidentally, I should list as the greatest pest experienced in travelling in Central



YOUNGER GENERATION OF LAS JUNTAS.



ZOPILOTES AT PIG-CLEANING IN A BACKYARD AT LAS JUNTAS.





America. It ranges in size from the infant no larger than a pinhead to the husky adult with muscular body the size of a man's thumbnail. While perfectly catholic in their taste, the *garrapatas* seem to prefer a full-blooded *gringo* to any other item of nourishment.

When the last *garrapata* had died the death by carbolic acid we listened to Chajud's enumeration of the charges against us: Beds, two colones; fifty centavos for the boy who had, under coercion, produced our stock; one colone for the *carbolina* and fifty centavos for the old woman who owned the *potrero*. It was a quarter to ten when we shook the dust of Las Juntas from the beasts' feet and turned north, in bad temper and calling down all manner of blights upon the *pueblo*.

We were out of the mountainous region for the time. There were a few hills to climb, but none of them were steep, and we trotted sometimes for an hour along a perfectly level trail over a lovely, fertile country, where cattle and horses stood knee-deep in green herbage, and white houses nestled in clumps of trees and flowering bushes. Women and girls came to the doorways and smiled at us, and the men working in the fields waved and wished us "*buenas dias*" as we rode past.

So we jogged along contentedly, our irritation fading in the soft, spring-like air of the forenoon. We expected to make Las Cañas—"The Canes"—by early afternoon, for Don Salomon had assured us the night before that it was but four hours' ride—"no más." We occupied the time by holding target practice on the foot-long *garroba* lizards and great spike-backed iguanas that scuttled with awkward speed along the trail ahead of the animals.

As usual, we got off the trail. From the rolling,

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sunny plains, dotted with the little cultivated patches and wattled cabins of the *peones*, we rode into the depths of thick jungle, where the way became a faintly marked bridlepath over dead leaves, with never a house for miles. Edna was in a tantrum, for, like many ladies, shooting made her nervous. When I scratched a match to light a cigarette she bounded suddenly sideways from the trail, landing in a clump of vines and nettles which brought her to her knees. I continued on my way alone for eight or ten feet, describing a complete revolution in the air and landing, very fortunately, on my feet.

When Norm had overtaken and brought Edna back, we rode on and came shortly afterward to a lone farm hewed out of the jungle. A bakers' dozen of mangy curs, vicious and hungry of expression, leaped out to meet us, snapping wolfishly at our booted legs, and were repelled only when we laid three of them senseless with the loaded butts of our quirts.

A man sprawled in a hammock on the verandah. He was apparently in the eighty-second—which is the most malignant—stage of hookworm, for our attack upon his dogs, usually the insult unforgivable in that land, produced not the slightest flicker of emotion upon his face. He informed us without apparent interest that the road to Las Cañas lay behind us a mile or more. We should have taken the fork to the left at the little clearing, he said, then composed himself once more for slumber.

We rode back to the clearing, with the curs snapping at our heels for a hundred yards or more until Norm, turning in his saddle, put a brace of bullets into the ground near them. At the clearing we found a faint path leading to the left, turned into it and followed it

for a mile or so—back to the lone house and the sleeping man.

He was aroused with increased difficulty and persuaded to sell us seven bananas from the bunch ripening under the verandah eaves. Then we rode hurriedly back once more, before he could give us further instructions as to the trail. This time, at a point nearly three miles past the clearing, we came upon the right trail.

At the first house on this road we hailed the inmates. A shock-headed, dirty *hombre* appeared in the doorway and informed us that it was still two hours' ride to the town, but refused us food. An old man rushed to the door and in high, cracked treble screamed that we would get "*Nada! Nada! Nada!*" ("Nothing!") at that house. We rode on, wondering at the old man's animosity and puzzling over the significance of the rudely outlined Greek cross upon the house-door.

One develops an Indian-like stolidity, an ability to ignore petty discomforts such as lack of food for a few weeks, or vermin-infested quarters regularly, when on the trail in the Five Republics. We were both ravenously hungry, for we had broken our fast in Las Juntas with nothing more substantial than a cup of coffee and a tiny roll apiece—"a canary-bird breakfast," Norm had growled—but we were both optimistically agreed that we must eventually reach Las Cañas and there make up at dinner-time what we had lacked at noon.

As we jogged along we occupied the time, as in the morning, with improvement of our marksmanship by snapshots at iguanas and garrobas. A native whom we overtook while watering his pony at a roadside stream seemed to enjoy our company. He trotted behind us, exclaiming ecstatically whenever a lizard came toppling from a treetop. He kept with us until

## 64 JOGGING THROUGH THE FOOTHILLS

we reached the Rio Las Cañas—filled with splashing, shouting youngsters—and rode into the straggling little town.

At the one hotel the proprietress, buxom, comely, smiling apologetically, appeared in answer to our shouts, to inform us with profuse regret that every room in her house was filled by an influx of travellers from Liberia, the capital of the department. But we were famishing, for ours were the appetites of outdoor men—ravenous, Gargantuan, beyond the ken of city-dwellers—so we stood fast and protested that we couldn't sleep in the street, and that if she turned us away we should certainly die of starvation on her doorstep.

At last she dimpled and we knew the battle was won. The stableman was called and ordered to put the stock in the hotel's pasture, while a little chambermaid went scurrying out into town to borrow cots for us.

When we looked at the reflection of our dirty, unshaven faces in the mirror and surveyed our generally unkempt appearance, it no longer surprised us that the landlady hadn't taken us to her ample, stiff-starched bosom. The marvel was that she had permitted two such hardbitten *machos* inside her tidy house at all.

The Costaricense of better degree—and the *peon* travelling doesn't patronize hotels—is usually clean-shaven and carefully, if not elegantly, dressed in white duck or linen trousers, white shirt and expensive panama hat. If riding, leather puttees are added to the costume. He may indeed be bare of feet, for some of the richer natives, even, will not be persuaded to don shoes. In fact, it is told of one very wealthy coffee-planter of humble beginnings that he once possessed a burning desire to visit the States. At the steamer-office in San José he made all arrangements



for accommodations, then went the round of his friends, telling them of the wonderful journey he was going to make. Someone informed him that in North America everyone wore shoes. He hastened to the ticket-agent to verify this alarming rumour, and, upon being assured of its truth, straightway cancelled his booking. He said that he had lived for forty-odd years without torturing his feet and wouldn't commence in middle age !

Bathed and shaved and full-fed, we wandered through the peaceful, quaint streets of the town, past groups of white-clad folk promenading toward the plaza by the church. We turned back to the hotel, to sit upon a bench in the cool dusk outside the door and speculate, over half a dozen cigarettes, how long a white man of energetic temperament could retain his sanity in such an enervating atmosphere.

If one had seen completion of every plan conceived in life, had tucked in the last loose end of his activities and only waited, in resignation, for the Great Adventure that closes earthly existence, then Las Cañas would be an ideal place of residence. Hanging over it is the drowsy quiet at even-fall, the solemn hush associated in one's mind with mossy, ruined abbeys ; it is as lazily peaceful as the picture of a rustic landscape at twilight, done in sepia. Even the squealing wooden axles of the ox-carts seemed less noisy as they moved slowly through these dusty streets.

While we waited for our coffee next morning we were joined by a conversational little policeman, who gave us, as strangers within the gates, varied information concerning the town. Now, I detest statistics for their own sake, finding no beauties in their angular figures ; hence they are interpolated here with all possible brevity, in all their unloveliness. Las Cañas, a town of



nearly five hundred people and uncounted dogs, lies some five hundred feet above the Gulf of Nicoya, which is ten miles distant, and is the metropolis of the orange-growing district of Costa Rica. We found the landlady's coffee much more to our taste than the policeman's data. Orange trees grow everywhere in this region; no house was too poor, too lowly, to be surrounded by the heavily burdened shrubs. But the *naranja* of Central America is only a plebeian poor relation of the golden globe of California or Florida. Greenish yellow when ripe, it is filled with large seeds and rather insipid of flavour.

As we lingered over our coffee and cigarettes in the dining-room we made the acquaintance of an American who gave us the benefit of his twenty-six years in the Five Republics. No dreary statistician he, with array of cold and bloodless figures. Each fact he cited was illustrated by object or colourful anecdote. So when he spoke of the peculiar system by which municipal affairs are administered in Costa Rica, he pointed out a short-waisted, long-legged native with Paderewski-like hair, just then passing the door at a peculiar limping canter.

"That fellow," said Mr. Hopkins, "was *Tesorero Municipal* (Municipal Treasurer) of Las Cañas a few years ago. Now he owns a livery-stable and doesn't do very well. The reason for the change is—rats. He had collected ten thousand colones when an investigating committee came up from San José to inspect his accounts. He welcomed the committee very cordially and escorted the members into his office.

"When they finished the inspection of his books—which showed the collection of the money in proper form—they asked to count the cash. He went to his

desk and threw back the top, then announced in anguished tones that the ten thousand colones—all in *billetes*, or notes—were gone!

“ ‘Well, where did it go?’ demanded a practical-minded committee-man.

“ ‘Gentlemen,’ replied the Treasurer simply, ‘I cannot lie to you. The rats must have eaten it.’ ”

“ ‘Did they arrest him?’ ” we wanted to know, and Mr. Hopkins shook his head.

“ ‘What was the use? Everyone in town knew that he didn’t have a cent. They decided that it was useless to lock him up, or shoot him, if that wouldn’t produce the money.

“ ‘A friend and I went into his livery-stable a few weeks ago and rented horses from him. When we came to pay the bills—for identical service, mind you—we found that I was charged sixteen colones, which was exorbitant, while my friend was let off with four, which was about six colones under regular rates. Naturally, I hauled him over the coals for his discrepancy in charging for the same service. But he shrugged and threw out his hands.

“ ‘Why, Señor Hopkins,’ he protested, ‘if I hadn’t charged you sixteen colones, I couldn’t have let your good friend off for four.’

“ ‘Now, I ask you, what could I answer to that?’ ”

Getting Solomon the King out of the pasture proved a long and difficult undertaking. He seemed to have no interest in the continuation of the journey and hid himself in long grass that covered him to the tips of his long ears. For the second time in my life I had to turn cow-puncher. After a headlong chase for some three miles, with Edna at his heels like a little red Nemesis, I managed to drop the loop of a lariat over his head. Edna swerved

off and braced herself like an old hand at the game, and our doughty *macho* came head-over-heels in mid-gallop. He was tame enough after his tumble, and followed quietly behind the mare to the hotel door.

It had been our intention to go on directly to Bagacas, but Mr. Hopkins advised us to turn aside toward Bebedero and inspect the Hacienda Mojica, the largest cattle-ranch in all Costa Rica. So we delayed departure until noon and gave the animals a huge ration of maize.

## CHAPTER III

### COSTA RICAN CATTLE-LAND

RAFTING MAHOGANY AT BEBEDERO—WHEN THE “CONGOS”  
ROARED—COSTA RICAN COWPUNCHING—A GUANACASTE TOWN—  
TRADING MOUNTS AT LIBERIA—FLAT ON THE PRAIRIE—CHILL WEL-  
COME AT SANTA ROSA—A “TYPICAL, TROPICAL TRAMP”—CUSTOMS  
INSPECTION AT LA CRUZ

WE were in the saddle immediately after breakfast. The stock, fresh from their long rest and further inspired, perhaps, by the maize, foxtrotted along a dusty trail that reminded me vividly of Texas. On either hand the scrub timber walled in the road, which was pitted and scored by the wheels of the ox-carts which had passed during the rainy season. Throughout all this region were few signs of cultivation, for we had left behind the section where small farmers predominated and come into the ranchland of Costa Rica, where the cattle barons hold broad acres of rolling grassland upon which they fatten the steers bought in Nicaragua for the market at Alajuela.

Except for the machete-hacked trails through the scrub and an occasional burned area that marked where some adventurous, land-hungry native was taking up a Government grant, there were almost no signs of human effort. Occasionally a horseman ambled toward us, to lift his hand in greeting and ride on, or an ox-cart, drawn by great, red, long-horned bullocks, squealed past.

The telegraph-wire was our guide, but the trail along

it grew so rough that we turned aside into the jungle to hunt out a better road, at whatever risk of going astray. But when we had pushed through a hundred yards of thorny bushes and saddle-high nettles, we decided that the open trail along the *línea telegrafica*, however pitted and cut, was better than pioneering.

Our return to the "wire" was rewarded by fairly smooth going within a mile, and we spurred the animals into a jogtrot once more, holding the usual target-practice upon garroba and iguana—much to Edna's disgust—with which the land seemed aswarm. Once we fired a few shots at a slim, yellow beast that sneaked off with belly to the leaves, moving with a swiftness and silence almost uncanny. It was our first glimpse of the *león*—the panther of Central America—in its "own homeland," and the fractious Edna came in for a full round of abuse, for the exhibition of fancy bucking with which she spoiled our aim.

We jogged on, with the animals padding over the dead leaves that carpeted the trail, heads almost between their knees, while we lounged in the saddle and watched the exhibit of natural history all about us. The silence of the wilds was heavy upon us, breeding a reluctance to speak. Then suddenly, from the thick jungle to the left, sounded a hoarse, coughing bellow like that of a hungry lion. I whirled in the saddle and came near to going headfirst into a clump of nettles, for Edna went into the air with a convulsive bound, and but for the heavy curb with which I controlled her destinies, would have bolted back along the way we had come.

For a couple of minutes I was too much occupied in maintaining the mastery of man over brute to consider the unearthly roar which had caused Edna's sudden display of energy. Then Norm turned, with a mixture



of puzzlement and uneasiness showing in his narrowed eyes, to wonder aloud what the noise could be.

"A bull, and irritated about something," I replied as carelessly as possible. "Haven't you heard a couple of *toros* squabbling to the same tune?"

Since this was the cattle-country we were crossing, my conjecture seemed reasonable enough, but with the coming of evening shadows one is always in danger of losing the proper perspective, especially in a country where both *jaguars* and panthers grow to an utterly improper size. Why too should Edna, a Costa Rican-bred mare, display such terror at the sound of a bull's brazen bass? She had carried me through herds of the half-wild cattle of the land before this, without showing the slightest evidence of interest, even, in their presence. So I argued out the matter mentally as we plodded along.

Then, simultaneously from several directions, came a chorus of booming, roaring bellows ending in short, hoarse coughs, at which Edna was again seized with panic. The sounds brought back to me the memory of Hawthorne's description of the Minotaur, voicing his blood-hunger in semi-human roars as he paced restlessly through the passages of the Cretan labyrinth.

So when Norm turned upon the impassive Solomon to declare emphatically, "That's no bull!" I nodded agreement and shifted the white butt of the six-gun a trifle closer to my pistol-hand, taking comfort from its nearness. So we rode on, a little more rapidly than before, with the roaring chorus swelling and subsiding and swelling again, all about us, but with no idea as to its origin.

Perhaps forty-five minutes later the trail widened, became more plainly marked with ruts of ox-carts. We



saw cleared patches, planted with sugarcane and plantains, and then a small hut with several men lounging before it in the shade of a matapala. They gave us water and one asked if we wanted food. He pointed toward the back of the house and we followed him to the rear, where a woman was working busily, cleaning the carcass of a great iguana. It was for *comida*, the man said, but we declined with thanks. There were occasions, later on, when an iguana-steak would have been very welcome, but not then. There was too much of the snake about the skinned body of the great lizard.

Under the blazing sun of late afternoon we came to the Rio Bebedero at the town of the same name and drew rein on the long, rickety bridge to watch men assembling a huge raft of chained mahogany logs for floating downstream to the Gulf of Nicoya and the waiting ships. Once past the little collection of thatched huts that flanked the road, we turned through a gate into the lands of the Hacienda Mojica and loped across a rolling prairie that stretched away to the foothills miles to the north-west.

Here are thousands of acres of the finest grazing-land I have ever seen in any country, well watered by numerous unfailing streams, the grass bright green, although no rain had fallen for four months. The soil has never felt the bite of ploughshare, though it is suitable, we were told, for all varieties of grain and vegetables. Land in this vicinity brings almost nothing; several thousand acres were being sold at the time of our arrival at prices of two and three dollars gold per acre.

Except for an occasional barbed-wire fence, there was the impression of illimitable distance as the animals loped nose-to-nose along the prairie-track, with the high, dry wind of the Guanacaste whipping at our

Stetsons. Half an hour of steady riding brought us to the hacienda, a squat, yellow building of two stories, encircled by broad, stone-paved verandah, near a clump of great trees.

All about the house grew the huge matapalas, their lustrous green foliage affording dense shade for the doorway. On the right of the house, a hundred yards distant, was the horse-corral, with milking-corral adjoining. We noted a water-tank mounted on a mule-cart, modern hay-tedders, ploughs and other implements that made Mojica seem more than ever a bit of Texas set down upon Costa Rican prairies.

The same gracious hospitality that greets the wayfarer in our own south-west was shown us by Don Aurelio Guell, the manager, who had our animals taken to the corral and assigned us a big bedroom in the upper floor of the house. Then we went in to the dinner-table.

It was an interesting meal, for the foremen of the six ranches which constitute the property of Mojica had been called in for a consultation and we got an insight into the difficulties under which a manager of modern training labours when he tries to modernize a Central American ranch.

The talk was of silos, which Don Aurelio told us had been very successful in other sections of the republic and which he considered installing on Mojica. But all the foremen condemned them loudly. The foreman of Mojica—the home-ranch—was particularly violent. He was a thick-shouldered man, slightly stooped, who ate with his chin barely above the level of the table. In the intervals of shovelling rice and beans into a capacious mouth, he glared down at the manager, waving his knife excitedly. The burden of his discourse—which is the reply of the native to any proposal to raise him from the

rut of ancient customs—was that his father and his father's father had lived and died on a cattle-ranch without ever laying eyes on a silo ; it was an impudent interference with the divine plan of Providence to attempt to provide feed for the stock during the seasons God had decreed scant pasturage. If the Lord hadn't intended the cattle to go hungry (yelled this apostle of anti-change), then every year would be one of plenty. He was against these new-fangled ideas. The other foremen, each responsible, under Don Aurelio, for a ranch, shouted approval of these views and Guell looked across at us whimsically.

Don Aurelio hadn't been out of Costa Rica since his graduation from the University of Louisiana, twelve years before. We found many things to discuss after dinner, and midnight rolled around almost before we realized it.

After breakfast next morning we sat for a time with Don Aurelio in his office, a cool, dusky room littered with saddles, *alforjas*, branding-irons, cases of shiny veterinary instruments—the pride of the manager, these last—and shelves of agronomical volumes and bound reports. Don Aurelio bore out the reputation for knowledge of agriculture in general and the cattle-industry in particular which Mr. Hopkins had given him.

It was especially interesting to compare the methods and conditions upon this, the largest property in Costa Rica, with those of the Texas ranches as I had known them. Don Aurelio's account of the difficulties he had encountered in improving the breed of cattle and horses by importations from the States and England, of replacing the ancient machinery of the Spaniards with modern equipment such as he had learned to use in Louisiana, contained many such incidents as that of the night



SAVONERAS (COWBOYS) ON HACIENDA MOJICA.



DESERTED HUT WHERE WE SPENT A NIGHT, NEAR THE NICARAGUAN FRONTIER.





before, and the tale of his pioneering was sometimes humorous, but more often pathetic. Back of it all it seemed to me that I saw the shadow of the man's indefatigable personality bulking very large.

Mojica, before Don Aurelio's time, was a fair specimen of the Costa Rican ranch. The owner had seized it while president of the republic, years before, and was now negotiating with a syndicate for its sale, for a price of two million eight hundred thousand colones, or about a million dollars in gold. But before the negotiations could be completed it was necessary to count the cattle on the six ranches of Miravalles, Catalina, Ciruelas, Palo Verde, San Jeronimo and Mojica, which, grouped, are known simply as the Hacienda Mojica. Nobody had anything approximating an accurate estimate of the number of head of stock. So Don Aurelio was counting the herds by means of the running-iron; each animal was counted, branded with a circle-tipped iron, then released. With some twenty-odd thousand cattle, five thousand horses and a few hogs to account for, this alone was a sizable task.

Horses were saddled for us by the *savoneras*, wild, picturesque riders in coarse cotton shirts and trousers, barefooted, with fringed leather leggings much like the *chaparejos* or "chaps" of the American puncher, but fitting the leg more tightly. They wore huge brass or iron spurs buckled to bare heels, and they swaggered when they walked and looked down upon the *peones* who were labourers, not cowboys, even though the labourer's wage was thirty colones a month, with food and lodging, while that of the *savonera* varied from fifteen to twenty-five. But the *peon* had to walk, while the cowboy rode, and that, in any Latinized country, makes a difference!



They had never seen stock-saddles such as ours, and many were the naïve comments we overheard as we hauled on our cinch-straps in the corral. The saddle-horns particularly impressed them. They thought that the rider would be in danger of rupturing himself by falling against them. When Don Aurelio tried to explain that with such saddles the American puncher could ride the worst animals with greater ease than they, upon their flat, pad-like saddles of untanned cowhide, they merely nudged each other knowingly. For the white beast assigned me was one of reputation for "orneriness," the fastest animal on the ranch, sired by an English thoroughbred, and out of a man-killing Arab-Peruvian mare. So the *savoneras* thought that the coming ride would prove the respective merits of the saddles.

With a half-dozen *savoneras* and the *mandador de campo*, the "range foreman," we started on a tour of the home-ranch. The cowboys rode "all over" their scrubby ponies—on the withers, the croup, or clinging to the side. Their saddles were nothing more than a thin pad made by sewing a mat of rushes between two cowhides with hair outside. When the hides had been stripped from a white or spotted cow, the saddle was a thing of colour. Their stirrups amused us greatly, for they were tiny iron cups, dangling from a cowhide string, in which the cowboy nonchalantly hooked a great toe to steady himself. The end of the rawhide or sisal lariat was fastened to a rawhide loop on the fore part of the saddle, instead of to the horn as with us.

We were anxious to see these cowboys use their ropes, so a small herd of steers was combed from the jungle adjoining an open pasture and with whirling loops and shrill yells the *savoneras* dashed down upon the herd.

They handled their lasso-ropes in much the same fashion as we do in the cattle-country of the States, but we thought them sadly lacking in the skill that marks our knights of rope and branding-iron. Will Rogers would have laughed—or cried—to see them.

A bad bull—at least, they said he was vicious—was cut out from the herd and with a half-dozen lariats about his horns and hoofs went crashing to the earth. Here—to all appearances—he fell peacefully asleep. The cowboys whooped their triumph, we applauded dutifully, and everyone was happy.

We galloped back to the house across prairies covered with tall, green-yellow *guinea* and *para* grass, then, turning from the plain, rode under a jungle-roof from which swung monkeys of every colour from pure red to coal-black, with parrots, tiny parakeets and the great gaudily coloured macaws by the hundreds screaming harshly as they made off before us. Suddenly a chorus of the bellowing roars we had heard the day before broke out from the jungle ahead, and Don Aurelio, after listening to our account of Edna's behaviour the preceding afternoon, offered to show us the animal which had frightened us—I mean the mare.

We reined in to a walk and kept close watch upon the treetops. For a time there was nothing to be seen in the branches except the droves of red monkeys with white faces, and black-and-tan monkeys which swung along abreast of us, now driving headlong across the trail, to the huge delight of the little ones borne on their mothers' backs. Then one of the *savoneras* riding ahead of us pulled his horse to a sudden halt and with finger upon his lips to enjoin silence pointed upward into a huge guanacaste tree, the top of which unfurled a hundred feet above our heads.

At first I could see nothing except dense foliage, then, by employing the Indian trick of regarding all but what I sought as frame for that object, I made out a black splotch upon a great gnarled limb. As I stared it moved slightly and became a hairy, dog-like face, black as ebony, with twinkling eyes like twin jet beads.

Before Norm could reach for the kodak the whole body came into view, a squat baboon whose dusky hide was unrelieved by a single lighter hair. Then Sir Congo, to give him the native name, swung off to deeper jungle with a speed far surpassing that of the red and parti-coloured monkeys with which he sometimes mingles amiably. His arrival in a more secluded spot was signalled by a single, triumphant roar, for except in early morning and late afternoon the congo is imbued with deep taciturnity.

The congo is harmless, and very shy. Don Aurelio could advance no explanation for Edna's nervousness before their appalling roars. Certainly any horse bred in the republic must be familiar with the sound, but she acted always as if panic-stricken whenever the trail led through the jungle and the bellowing came to her ears. It may be that one pulled her tail in colthood. *Quién sabe?*

The *savoneras*, slyly anxious to test our horsemanship, led the way toward the hacienda at a breakneck gallop and over the roughest shortcuts they knew. My mount showed nothing save a speed which made me long to own him, and the utmost indifference to the road he travelled. So at a breakneck gallop we cut through the wilderness of madroños and oaks, the pachotes, cedars and mahogany trees, sliding down the steep banks of little streams where black herons and snowy cranes flapped up awkwardly as the horses splashed

through the shallows, and great alligators slid sluggishly from the logs they resembled and swam away from the disturbance.

As we sat on the verandah after the noon-meal, looking across the flat grassland toward Bebedero, Don Aurelio spoke of the lack of intelligent labour to carry out his plans for modernizing Mojica. As he talked I watched a horseman galloping along the track from the little town by the river.

"But if that's the trying feature of ranching in the tropics," said Don Aurelio, "we have compensations, too. The strikes and labour agitations that gum the wheels of progress in the States aren't known down here. We're thankful for that much."

The rider I had been watching galloped through the gate at this moment and pulled his little mount to a sliding halt to announce to Don Aurelio that the lighters in which the cattle of Mojica are transported down the Rio Bebedero to the Gulf of Nicoya and Puntarenas would not be at Bebedero on the morrow.

"But why?" snapped the manager, and the rider shrugged.

"The lightermen are on strike for higher wages," he said.

So it seems that the modern note is coming, if slowly, to the tropics. Don Aurelio may yet see Mojica a replica of the properties of the States, with labour unions and walking delegates and minimum wage and accident compensation.

We bade these hospitable folk good-bye in early afternoon and turned the animals' heads to the north, toward Bagacas. There was a fair dirt trail along the *línea telegráfico*, the single strand of telegraph wire, strung from pole to pole on the plains, from tree to tree



in the jungles, that links together in the Morse code the countries from Mexico to the "Ditch" at Panama. We jogged past the Hacienda San Jeronimo, with its herds of fat cattle and horses branded with the *fleur-de-lis*, and rode on stirrup-to-stirrup under the unrivalled blue of a cloudless sky, with a faint, cool breeze that tempered the sun's rays.

It was sunset when we galloped into the main street of Bagacas and inquired our way to the hotel of Doña Rosa Muñoz. Doña Rosa, a silvery-haired old lady, threw up her hands in pious horror for that two such hungry-looking *machos* should descend upon her at the *tarde* hour of six and demand hospitality. But we had learned the trick. After announcing our need of food and lodging we unsaddled while the landlady talked, and piled our outfits inside the house. Then we demanded a *muchacho* to lead our animals to the pasture.

Doña Rosa shook her head resignedly, then placed cupped hands to her lips and sent a shrill yell across the street, at which a "boy" of some sixty-odd years appeared to take away the beasties. Norm went with him, to hobble Solomon, while I ensconced myself in the parlour to write my notes. The black-bound book aroused the curiosity of the elderly female who acted as cook for the establishment, and she stood at my elbow as I worked, putting many questions concerning our past, present and probable future.

When I explained that my tale was of the glories of Central America she asked if mention would be made of the hotel—and its cook. I never quarrel with the *cocinera*, so I assured her that due note would be made of the inn and the mistress of the kitchen, and showed her its name written plainly in my chronicle. So we parted with mutual expressions of esteem.

*Comida* came to us by the hands of a sixteen-year-old daughter of Doña Rosa, whose intelligent face and quaint English bore out the evidence of the Costa Rican Normal School pennant hanging in the parlour below the picture of the Virgin.

We were ready to depart at six the following morning, for he who would travel in comfort in the tropics must do most of his journeying in the early morning or late evening hours. The *mozo* brought in the animals from the *potrero* and fed them maize; then we examined their backs—an anxious procedure when one must ride the same beast daily—and found that Solomon of the saturnine visage was suffering from saddle-galls. We treated the galls with vaseline and covered them with clean, white cloth, then saddled and rode out through the quiet single street of the little village.

Both Edna and Solomon were possessed of contrary streaks that bright Sabbath morning. Once upon the open road they wanted to return to Bagacas, to stand when we would have had them go forward, and to set out at a breakneck gallop when we pulled them to a halt to roll cigarettes. It was a dry, desolate region, of white, chalky earth covered with parched thorn bushes, and the blazing sun intensified the dreariness of the landscape.

At a wattled hut in a tiny clearing at the roadside we halted and asked for water. A shy, barefooted little maid brought out a huge gourd containing enough water for both of us and—almost—for the animals as well.

In Central America one may pay for food when eaten, if one is plainly richer than the host, but water is only given. When the distance these folk carry their water is considered—I have seen girls striding along under their huge water-jars when they had fully a league to go from



stream to house—water becomes a precious thing and its giving a real charity.

So I looked about for some way to reward the shy-smiling little *niña* without giving insult, and chanced to see a pile of *dulce*—cakes of crude, brown sugar—on the table inside the hut. A woman informed me that they were worth five centavos each, so I took two and handed the little girl two *billetes* of ten centavos each, then we rode on hurriedly. Until we were clean out of hearing the honest people of the place kept shouting after us to come back for our change.

We had been instructed to follow the telegraph-wire. Well and good! We tried to follow it; wanted nothing more than the chance. But the wire and the trail were like two short-tempered companions; for a time they marched along together amicably enough, then some point of disagreement (apparently) would arise and *lina* swung one way and *camino* another. At first we stuck by the wire, thinking that anything was better than the intolerable glare of the sun on white dust, but after a few excursions over narrow line-riders' paths through withered, spiky scrub-jungle, we revised our opinion and hurried back to the road.

In the shallow waters of the Rio Liberia we found welcome coolness. It was difficult, indeed, to drive the animals out of the water and into the streets of the town above.

Liberia, being the capital of the province, was a thriving place, the market-town for the region for miles round about. But in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, one Central American *pueblo* differs from any other only in point of size. The streets of Liberia were as thick with white dust as those of Texas cow-towns were a dozen years ago. There were the same squares of whitewashed

adobe buildings along the busy streets ; the same huddle of pole-walled, thatched huts in the poorer sections ; the same crudely lettered signs in blue or red paint upon white house-fronts, announcing the location of grocery store, market, drygoods merchant or barber. So much we saw as we rode up and down looking for a place to eat a belated breakfast.

The word " hotel," although spelled exactly and pronounced almost identically (" ō-tāl ") the same in Spanish as in English, seldom fails to puzzle the Central American. Unless he chances to be standing before some well-known inn, the name of which includes the word, he will almost invariably repeat the question with a puzzled expression and at last murmur "*no sabe*" in surly tones, as if suspicious that he is somehow being made the butt of a subtle jape.

We rode up and down the dusty streets under a sun that seemed to hang like a molten brass disk in the pitiless blue bowl overhead, and if Liberia has ten thousand inhabitants, as Messrs. Rand, McNally claim, then I feel that I may safely say that I addressed half the population before a precocious youngster nodded understanding of my question and trotted before us to the hotel of one Rodriguez.

The fire had gone out in the beehive-shaped clay oven which serves these people as stove ; the fat landlady was half asleep and very comfortable in her hammock. We could get nothing to eat until the evening meal, she told us, and fell straightway asleep once more. But there chanced to be an American timber-buyer in the place, and he guided us to a little bakery near the hotel where we got a huge bagful of caraway cookies for ten centavos.

We lounged away the afternoon beneath the verandah

roof, watching the townspeople pass listlessly through the streets. Our talk drifted to New Orleans, which seemed as far away as China, and we wondered what an iced drink would be like, if we were sitting in a certain cool spot we all knew well, on upper Canal Street.

Canvas cots aren't conducive to deep slumber, so we were dressed by daylight on Monday morning. After coffee in the patio we went in a body, Norm, Mr. Wood and I, to the local post office, and here assisted the force of clerks to compute the postage necessary to send our bundles of notes and films back to San Francisco. This occupied a full hour, for many were the instructions which must be first found, then read; and when all was over, there remained nothing to do but return to the hotel and wait for breakfast.

It was census-making time in the Province of Liberia. The agents based on the town and rode daily into the country, and one was a fellow-guest at Rodriguez's. This amiable young man admired Solomon's bulging muscles, and as we prepared to saddle the animals in the door-yard offered to trade his light-bay Guanacaste horse for the *macho*. Knowing that Solomon's saddle-galls were rapidly becoming worse under Norm's weight, we had difficulty in concealing the eagerness with which we regarded the proposal. But we managed to assume a critical expression apiece as we walked round the *caballo* and found fault with his table-manners and accused him of every malignant vice that came to our minds. At last we consented to exchange the *macho* for the horse and fifty colones, then permitted the young man to argue us into accepting twenty colones.

Forest- and prairie-fires were everywhere, it seemed, as we rode north from Liberia. The horses moved nervously over the great areas of blackened grass and

smouldering embers where the wind whipped clouds of pungent ash and smoke into our faces. During the afternoon we forded several broad, swift streams, and in crossing one of these the unfortunate Edna slipped and pinned me in water over my head as I lay prostrate beneath her. Fortunately my sheath-knife was near my hand and a prick with the point in her shoulder woke her to activity in time to let me slip out from under her before I drowned.

The flat country-side was alive with bird-life retreating before the flames. Wild turkeys roosted in the trees above the trails ; the great, grey Costa Rican jay scolded us from the bushes at the roadside ; a red-headed woodpecker drummed upon a dead stub in a clearing ; while in the waters of the streams snowy herons and great black cranes stood fishing, and rose with reproachful croakings as we splashed through their preserves. From his perch above a quiet pool a tiny kingfisher watched with beady, bright eyes for minnows. Beside the trail, just beyond a stream, we came upon fully a hundred *zopilotes* and turkey-buzzards, fighting off a baker's dozen of the white-headed true buzzards from the carcass of a steer.

From Liberia to Puerto Rillos—wherever that may be!—is called a four-hour ride. We had been in the saddle since one, and when seven o'clock found us still jogging through the twilight over an apparently uninhabited land—rolling prairie with scrubby thorn-bushes in the ravines and along the beds of the streams—we made uncomplimentary comment regarding the length of Costa Rican hours.

Darkness came and still we rode on, the horses stumbling in the ox-cart ruts, following the gleam of the wheel-marks in the white soil. Light gleamed ahead through an opening in the scrub, but when we had spurred the weary



animals into a jolting trot it was only another prairie-fire, an immense wall of flame extending for miles across the plain.

We skirted the edge of the fire and picked up the trail on the other side—somehow. It now became necessary for one of us to dismount every hundred yards or so and grope through the darkness until a pole was located, then toss a clod upward and listen for the clang of it upon the telegraph-wire, to assure ourselves that we weren't wandering astray on one of the countless cattle-trails criss-crossing the plain in this region. We rode bent over the saddle-horn, straining our eyes to make out the slightly lighter coloration that marked the passage of the ox-cart wheels. At this game our eyes seemed better than those of the horses.

Far behind us was the red glow of the prairie-fire. The horses scrambled on and came at last into an open space, where the white, chalky earth was faintly marked with a hundred paths. To the left we could see, dimly, a dark line as of a wall of trees. The *línea* had disappeared, and since it is as often strung from living trees as from cut poles, in that dark mass I thought was the logical place to look for it. Norm disagreed with me, so I turned Edna's head to the left and she stumbled over the pitted, scarred earth, placing her feet reluctantly before her in the pitchy darkness.

The trees proved to be several hundred yards distant, and when I reached them and drew the little mare to a halt there was no sign of the telegraph-wire. I yelled to Norm, whom I had left in the shelter of a bush rolling a cigarette, but got no answer.

It seemed impossible that the wire could have vanished entirely, so I forced Edna into the jungle, which seemed to stretch for some distance, though the

darkness prevented any definite estimate of its width. As I ducked to evade a creeper that slapped my face there came suddenly the rasp of vicious snarling from my left. Instinctively I whirled, still hunched, as instinctively jerked my gun, to look down upon two greenish, incandescent globes close to the earth.

Simultaneously with my shot Edna went into the air in a twisting buck surpassing anything she had ever done in this line, and I went headfirst to the ground. I sat up, a trifle dazed, although the thick felt of my Stetson had somewhat broken the force of my landing and a naturally thick skull had once more been my friend. The animal had disappeared, but close beside me was the warm carcass of a calf and I could hear Edna crashing through the bushes on her way elsewhere.

It was half an hour before Norm, who had heard my shot, could locate me. I had started for the open where I had left him, while he had been on an exploration of his own. In the darkness one spot looked exactly like the next, so I sat down and smoked, giving an occasional yell to guide him if he heard.

For sheer aloneness that half-hour will always be remarkable in my memory, I am sure. It was like sitting on a pole-top, surrounded only by empty darkness, somewhere between the worlds; the only man.

We found a little nook in the lee of low bushes, and there Norm unsaddled his *caballo*. Food was in his *alforjas*—little, hard rolls made of wheat-flour, black bean-paste, *tortillas*, fried plantains—and we had drunk deeply at a stream a little while before. So we were comfortable enough as we spread the saddle-blanket and Norm's bed-blanket upon the short, soft grass. We ate, and prepared to spend the night.

An hour passed, perhaps, while we smoked and laid



plans for Edna's recapture in the morning. While Norm was talking there came to me realization that I had been hearing for some time a stealthy rustling in the bushes a little way off, but hadn't consciously noted the sound. I nudged Norm and we pinched out the coals of our cigarettes and lay, listening, with six-shooters drawn.

That region is constantly traversed by roving bands of Nicaraguenses coming south into Costa Rica ; thieves almost without exception, murderers sometimes, if the opportunity comes to land a machete-stroke from behind on a victim who seems worth robbing. Our outfits would have brought a sum sufficient to make independent for months the *hombre malo* who could take them from us, so we never took a chance of being surprised.

The rustling in the undergrowth grew louder and slowly we raised gun-muzzles to cover the spot from which it sounded. Then a familiar snort—of satisfaction, I do believe—came from almost at our elbows, and Edna sauntered out of the bushes and over to where Norm's horse was staked. Came a burst of squeals—triumphant from Edna ; indignant and distressed from the other cayuse—and we grinned. It was merely the announcement of the mare, by means of heels tattooing upon her trailmate's ribs, that she was back and once more BOSS—spelled just like that—of the pair.

How she found us was more than we could explain ; she nuzzled my shoulder when I unsaddled her and seemed pleased to be with us again. During the time we owned each other she did more canny things than the trailing of two men and a horse over a mile or so of prairie.

We were up with the dawn, a sudden flushing of the black sky over the low trees that lasted but a moment, then deepened to the hue of flame as the sun's red edge rose over the horizon like a theatre-curtain raised hastily. When the remnant of our food had been finished we saddled the horses and rode in search of the *línea*. Daylight showed rolling prairies, covered with short, dry grass. A mile or so beyond our camp the wire came strolling out of the trees, so to say, with hands in pockets.

With the rising of the sun we were forced to slacken speed and so pulled in the animals to the mile-eating running-walk. Noon came, and we had seen not a house, nor a wayfarer. We took shelter in the shade of a clump of *roble de sabana* until the midday heat was broken, then jogged on through the afternoon, over unfenced plain that stretched away to the northward as far as eye could reach.

In this day of crowded lands, of cities and towns rubbing elbows wherever one travels, there is a wonderful satisfaction born of wandering through open spaces that stretch for miles without a touch of human hands upon them. Here in Costa Rica we two rolling stones found it, and under the spell of the open we forgot petty annoyances, even the accumulating hunger had no power to break our peace. We smoked and breathed deep and slouched comfortably in the saddle, happy enough because we were where we were, and not caring greatly if we ever arrived anywhere, or merely rode on.

In late evening the plains began to be cut by deep gullies, into which the trail dipped abruptly; clumps of low trees grew close together. Congos roared in the thickets, brown and parti-coloured monkeys swung chattering from the trees, while the great gaudy-

feathered macaws merely cocked their heads to watch us, all unafraid of man.

Darkness fell and still we jogged on, hardly expecting to find a hacienda that night, for in this region of great cattle-ranches, there are very few villages and it is often as much as two days' ride from ranch-house to ranch-house. But at ten o'clock, as we were thinking of making camp, a cluster of lights twinkled in the darkness far ahead. We rowelled the weary beasts into a stiff trot and so came to a group of buildings set upon a hill-side.

Through the quiet air came the clicking of a telegraph sounder, and we followed the sound to an open door from which the light streamed out. The operator told us curtly that we were upon the Hacienda Santa Rosa, a cattle-ranch owned by one Dr. O'Barrios. We asked for hospitality, and with no decrease of surliness the operator took down an oil-lantern and led us to a row of old horse-stalls that served as sleeping-quarters for several *peones*. One of the stalls he assigned us as bedroom.

With brands picked from a fire burning in the yard, we examined the place. It was dirt-floored and rather worse than any stable I have ever seen in the States. The only alteration made in the interior to fit it for a *dormitorio* had been the addition of a mahogany plank some three feet wide by twelve long which ran along the rear wall. This board, the operator informed us, was the bed. We asked for food, and he growled, "*Tengo nada*," the equivalent of "Got nothing." "No women here to cook," he condescended to explain further—an obvious lie, for several women had peeped out of a doorway at us as we passed.

From the ring of *peones* squatted about the fire one rose

silently, an ancient *hombre*, bare of head and feet, clad only in a suit of ragged denim modelled on pyjama-lines. Without a word he drew from a cranny in his stall a tin pan of black beans, a sooty can containing a pint or so of cold coffee ; last he brought out a long, rusty wire, upon which were skewered chunks of dried meat. Two pieces of the meat he pulled from the wire, then replaced it carefully, for among the poorer classes of Costa Rica and Nicaragua meat is a luxury.

So we ate our beans—the meat was no more than a bite apiece—from the pan, using *tortillas* rolled into cylinders for spoons, and completed the meal by eating the spoons.

The night was one of torture, for the bed-plank was acrawl with *gārrapatas* and a tiny red insect, the name of which I don't know, but with whose fangs I grew woefully familiar. We scratched and tossed and prayed for daylight, and it came on lagging feet.

We could get nothing to eat next morning, and, to add a feeling of insult to that of injury we already possessed, the first thing our eyes rested upon was the big house of the ranch-owner, set on a crest above the other buildings. Smoke curled lazily up from the chimneys, evidence of food cooking, but for us there was "*nada*." It was a sharp change from the hospitality which had greeted us thus far in Costa Rica, so perhaps the incident bulked larger in our minds than it merited, but we hoped fervently that the time would come when we might turn the tables on the tribe O'Barrios. We tossed a colon to the kindly *peon* who had fed us the night before, and rode north toward La Cruz and the *frontera*.

We jogged on at that mile-eating gait, the running-walk, pausing in sheltered coulees for cigarettes and



conversation, for the high wind rendered either smoking or talking impossible in the open. In the patches of woodland the monkeys gathered overhead to pelt us with round, insipid fruit of some unknown variety, and from the depths of the far jungle to the east came the booming roars of the congos, their bass chorus setting Edna adance with fright.

Occasionally, from behind a hill, the Pacific came in view, and the travellers we began to meet—vagabond Nicaraguenses, for the most part, walking with all their ragged worldly possessions slung in small bundles from machete-ends in the style of the hoboes of our comic supplements—told us that we must ride five hours to make La Cruz.

One wayfarer was of a different genus, an elderly Irishman who bore all the earmarks of the thirty-third degree "Triple T," the "Typical, Tropical Tramp." He asked about drinking water on the road ahead and we passed on to him all the information we could, including "the office" on the Clan O'Barrios. He nodded at the last.

"Oi've heard o' Santa Rosy," he said. "'Tis the same dope the boys in the cable-office in San Juan del Sur (Nicaragua) was handin' me. Oi'll be givin' that hacyendy a woide berth, Oi'm thinkin'. Can ye spare a trail-brother a peso? The boys at San Juan donated a pair o' shoes, but divil a cint have Oi for grub."

He had hiked all the way from Guatemala City to where we found him, just south of the Nicaraguan frontier, and what his experiences must have been, without money, trade or knowledge of the language, are more than I can picture. We handed over all our spare Costa Rican currency and rode on, and he, shouldering his bundle once more, turned his face to





A "TYPICAL, TROPICAL TRAMP" NEAR LA CRUZ.



the south again, toward Bogotá, Colombia. We hope he reached it.

La Cruz we saw full two hours before the winding trail permitted us to enter its outskirts. Despite the high wind it was blazing hot, for the hard, white earth fairly radiated the sun's rays. We jogged through the thirty-odd huts that comprise the town, and at the store of a buxom, amorous-eyed Nicaraguan woman bargained for breakfast and maize for the horses.

Our hostess slapped her broad, bandaged-toed feet coquettishly about the dirt floor as she set our meal upon the table, pausing from time to time to cast at the broad-shouldered Norm languishing glances from beneath drooped lids, while I hid my working face behind the notebook. The effect of her coquetry was somewhat lessened by her two hundred pounds and up.

All her flirtatiousness vanished magically when we refused to consider *agua con dulce*—water sweetened with brown sugar—as a breakfast beverage, and demanded coffee. Then she began to slam the tin plates about in the manner of a bad-tempered child. But we got our coffee.

In Northern Costa Rica and throughout Nicaragua we found the fragrant berry in the same status as the Irish pigs—too valuable for home-consumption. On the tables of the poor it is replaced by a drink made of boiled, parched corn and brown sugar, a not unpalatable beverage called *pinole*. Nearly always, however, we could get coffee if we insisted.

When we had eaten we holstered our weapons under our shirts and rode up to the customs-house. La Cruz, being the northernmost town of Costa Rica, though not on the frontier, contains the customs officials of both Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Here our passports were

inspected—upside down—by an anæmic official and returned to us. We didn't offer to submit our belongings for inspection, and the guard of ragged soldiers, after hesitating for a time, made no move to ransack the *alforjas*.

Warned by our experience at Santa Rosa, we rode back to the store of the Nicaraguan woman and reduced our stock of Costa Rican currency to less than three colones by the outlay of seventy-five centavos for a dozen rolls made of mixed corn-meal and wheat-flour.

Turning north from the shop, we dived immediately into thick jungle in pursuit of the telegraph wire, which seemed fated to be our constant companion. We were thankful to be gone from the miserable collection of sapling-walled huts where pigs, chickens, dogs and *garrapatas* bed down with the natives of mixed Costa Rican-Nicaraguan blood in a single squalid room. The only compensatory quality about La Cruz was that we were not required to remain there.

## CHAPTER IV

### COUNTRY OF NICARAO THE CACIQUE

SLEEPING WITH A "TOBOBA"—ACROSS THE BORDER AT SAPOA  
—ALONG LAKE NICARAGUA—RIVAS, WILLIAM WALKER'S CAPITAL  
—ROAD TO GRANADA—NOTES ON NICARAGUAN HOSPITALITY—  
WEARING THE GUNS OUTSIDE—GRANADA AND GOOD-BYE TO EDNA  
—NICARAGUAN RAILWAY VOYAGE.

THE trail was one of the worst, if not the worst, that we had yet encountered, a mere line-riders' path along the wire. It was hot with a furnace-like heat in the depths of that still, parched jungle. Take the temperature of a torrid August day in Southwest Texas, add the oppressive silence of noontide on a summer's day in the fields, and the result will be a fair imitation of our surroundings that sultry afternoon. Even the birds, the hardy jays which usually heralded our intrusion upon the jungle thickets, were content to sit listlessly in the thickest tree-tops they could find.

This region was one of low hills, jungle-crested, over which the trail rose and dipped, rose and dipped again. In the low places the earth had been scored and pitted by the feet of oxen in the rainy season and was now baked stone-hard by the blazing sun. There were holes two feet deep, their edges not two inches apart. Here the horses showed such distress that it would have been cruelty to ride them. We dismounted and let them go on ahead while we stumbled along as best we might in their wake.



The only water on this trail was that left in stagnant, malodorous pools in the beds of little streams, and at this slimy, crawling liquid even the animals sniffed in disdain. We followed such a dry watercourse through the afternoon until at dusk we came upon a deserted cabin on a hill-side, with a plantation of plantains behind it. There were neither ripe *plátanos* nor drinkable water, so we settled ourselves for a comfortless night, with a fortitude which would have been hard to assume earlier in our journey.

In a little shack adjoining the cabin was nearly a ton of maize-ears, rat-gnawed, but acceptable to the beasts. They fared better than we that night, for we shelled a couple of bushels of the maize for them, while our own supper consisted of the dry rolls, topped by cigarettes.

As we ate, Norm rested his six-shooter casually upon my knees and, before I realized his intention, snapped a six-inch centipede from a pole a few inches from my left hand. The insect fell in two quivering sections upon the dirt floor as I rose with what dignity I could muster. Nonchalance is a most admirable quality, but in my opinion it has its well-defined limits; this I told Norm as I tendered him my share of the ruined hut. I felt that the next time a mosquito rested for an instant upon my ear I might expect a casual bullet clipping the insect from its perch. For the sake of the nerves of those who might witness such an exhibition I thought it better to nip Norm's habit in the bud.

With our saddles for pillows and folded blankets covering us from necks to boot-tops, we stretched out on a smooth piece of ground between cabin and corn-crib and fell asleep, waking once, at midnight, to pry Edna loose from Twopercents, Norm's cayuse, who was

fighting a losing battle of heels against the mare's vicious onslaught.

When I opened my eyes at dawn a heavy pall of nimbus-cloud covered the sky and scattering raindrops were falling upon my face. Norm sat up at the same moment and stared about him sleepily. I started to rise, but he shoved me down again quickly while he wriggled from his blanket and with a long stick ejected a highly insulted, two-foot-long *toboba* from its nest between my booted feet, and hastened its departure with a few left-handed shots from his gun. My habit of passing the night without moving—coupled with Norm's quick action—had stood me in good stead. The reptile had evidently crawled into bed with me some time after midnight, and had I moved . . . I remembered the words of the native clerk at Aguacate and agreed that "it is not good to jest with Señor Toboba."

We saddled in haste and rode off through the drizzling rain, with the telegraph wire pointing the way to the Nicaraguan border. The builders of the line had chosen to throw the wire along the open space above a rocky stream which zigzagged hither and yon on its leisurely way to Lake Nicaragua. The horses stumbled for miles over water-logged roots and glassy rocks, made one steep ascent and clambered down the far side of another.

The river widened as we tended toward the frontier and we stopped to splash awhile in a shallow pool. The way continued nightmarish, being nothing more than the bed of the stream, or an eight-inch shelf along the mud bank. It seemed typical of Latin shiftlessness that the inhabitants of the region should stumble over such a boulder-strewn path when a few hours' work with machete would have provided an almost level path along the high bank of the stream.

In the houses we came to in mid-morning it was interesting to observe that the racial characteristics of the people were changing. The fair, blue- or grey-eyed Costaricensens—products of admixture of foreign blood with the native stock—we had encountered in the coffee-country were giving way to the swarthy, hook-nosed Indian type more usually met with in Nicaragua.

Shortly before noon, as we looked northward through a rift in the tree-clad hills, we caught our first glimpse of the Gran Lago—the “Grand Lake”—as Lake Nicaragua is known to the Central American.

The region we were entering was straightway clothed with the mist of Romance, because of its eventful history. In this vicinity, perhaps along the very route we travelled, had marched and countermarched the docile little *soldados* of Costa Rica in 1856 and '57, to attack the blue-shirted “Falange” of General William Walker, the American adventurer and knight-errant who stands without a peer in the annals of Lost Causes. The hacienda of Santa Rosa, where we had been given such scant hospitality, may well have been the “country-house of Santa Rosa,” mentioned in Walker’s chronicle, where Walker’s lieutenant, Schlessinger, was defeated by the Costa Rican levies.

With that one glimpse of glinting water to the northeast, the dripping green wilderness took on another aspect. Forgotten our weariness; of no account the temper-straining difficulties of the nightmarish trail. As the horses scrambled and stumbled over the deeply pitted track I peopled the land with ghosts; brown, barefooted little Costaricensens, trailing their long smoothbores, rather closely watched by their officers lest they melt into the convenient jungle-depths and desert an unpopular cause; blue-shirted, high-booted Americans, with

an occasional Briton among the ranks, with fierce, tangled beards and fiercer blue eyes, their belts heavy with cartridge-boxes and holding up the long-barrelled, deadly Colts. . . .

At midday we rode up to a house nestling in the green hollow between two low hills. Here, with an inquisitive, friendly macaw clambering over our shoulders and muttering in our ears, we got breakfast, while the rain-drops drummed on the tin verandah roof and a troop of wide-eyed children watched us apprehensively from the cookhouse door.

Food was plentiful and cheerfully supplied the wanderer: fried eggs topping boiled rice which had been sharply seasoned with red pepper; black beans mashed to a paste and baked in little cakes; new-made cottage cheese to spread upon smoking, foot-wide *tortillas*. Then the woman of the house came from the kitchen bearing slender, carved gourds, each set in a wooden stand, filled with *pinole*, the chocolate-flavoured beverage made from the liquor of boiled, parched corn, sweetened with *dulce* and whipped to a brown foam by whirling paddle-sticks as the Mexicans made chocolate before Cortez's time.

We ate until we could hold no more, then paid the smiling cook a colon and staggered out to the horses, beating the *garrapatas* each from the other's trousers as we went.

It is said to be impossible for a normal man to swear continuously through an entire afternoon, but we did our humble best by the authorities who are presumed to supervise the highways of Costa Rica.

The road became *El Camino Real* in early afternoon, and we can only state that, if that trail is a royal highway, then monarchs are easily satisfied when on the



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march. Its surveyed centre—if it had such a thing—was flanked by the telegraph wire ; but a dozen wriggling trails penetrated the jungle on either side, marks of the scorn of travellers who had preceded us for the “ Royal Highway.” The road itself was for the most part only a deep morass.

Time after time we slipped from the saddle to stand upon a tiny hummock and haul out the straining beasts by the bridle-reins from some bog into which they had sunk belly-deep. All afternoon we struggled alternately through the mud in the open spaces and over jungle-trails where the thorns slashed legs and faces or kept us flattened along the horses’ necks, until at last we crossed the *frontera* and entered Nicaragua at the Hacienda Pina Blanca.

If we hadn’t been informed beforehand that this ranch marked the border, we might have been pardoned for ignorance of the fact that the first stage of our overland journey was completed. There was no monument, of course, not so much as a blaze on a tree-trunk, to show the boundary-line. We paused to administer a brief mental kicking for bothering to visit the customs officials in La Cruz. We might have ridden straight into Nicaragua without anyone having shown the slightest interest.

When we had passed the Ranch of the White Pine the discomforts of the trail vanished magically from our minds. We pushed on toward Sapoá with a return of the high spirits which had marked departure from San José. For the country of Nicaraó the Cacique, whom Don Gil Gonzales de Avila had “ converted ” in 1519, whose name the land still bears in a twisted form, was ours, all ours, to explore.

It was mid-afternoon when we saw before us a long,



low, unpainted building on the southern shore of the Gran Lago. We rode through a gap in the fence that served as gate to inquire of a gaping *mozo* the distance to Sapoa. He stared at us open-mouthed for an instant, then turned and called to a half-dozen of his fellows, who stood watching us.

“ They want to know how far it is to Sapoa ! ” cried the first *mozo*, and, “ Sapoa ! ” exclaimed the others with deep amazement. “ Why—why, señores, *this* is Sapoa ! ”

“ Then may we sleep here to-night and get food, and *almuerzo* (breakfast) to-morrow morning ? ”

“ Of a certainty, señores ! ”

“ And maize for the horses ? ”

“ *Sí como no !* ”

This, the favourite expression of the Central American of whatever degree, has several shades of meaning : “ Of course ! ” “ Why not ? ” “ Most assuredly ! ” “ Certainly ! ” “ Who can doubt it ? ” One has to listen very carefully to the inflection to get the reply to a question.

But in this case we had no such difficulty. A *mozo* led off the weary nags to the *potrero*, stretching from the verandah-edge to the shore of the Rio Sapoa, and gave them maize. We hung our saddles from a beam in the roof and accepted a cluster of ripe, golden bananas from a beaming, friendly *hombre* who shoved forward a long bench to serve us as seat.

From where we loafed there, looking across the brown fields that ran down to the river-bank, we could see the *peones* coming in from their work in jungle and plain. Some had machetes in sheaths at their belts, or carried rakishly beneath their arms ; others bore axes with six-foot helves. All were grinning and joking with one

another, a cheerful, contented, and very ragged crew. A long dugout canoe came shooting up the broad river that bisects Sapoá, to unload a cargo of bananas upon the bank below the house.

Twilight came as we talked with the friendly *mozo* of the simple things that made up his daily life. Through the soft, grey haze the boy-of-all-work moved about his evening tasks, bringing water in two huge cans upon a tiny white pack-horse, or carrying—on the back of the same patient little beast—the bananas from the river-bank to a store-room in the house. He smiled gently upon us each time he passed.

The *peones* answered a shrill yell from the rear by filing back to the kitchen behind the house, to return with gourd dishes heaped high with black beans, boiled rice, stewed venison with *chilis*, and boiled green plantains. They bolted their supper in silence and returned the gourds to the kitchen.

We, as Yanques and paying guests, were assigned seats at a table on the rear verandah. The foreman's wife brought us tin plates filled with similar food to that the *peones* had eaten, but with the substitution of *tortillas* for the boiled plantains. It was a good meal by Central American standards and we brought sharp appetites to the work of eating.

When we came again to the front verandah, which was the gathering-place of the hands, the men were seated in a compact little group in the darkness. Apparently, it was their hour of recreation; a guitar strummed a plaintive, monotonous refrain that might have been the voice of the native, for its monotony was the monotony of their dull lives; it began anywhere—or nowhere—and ended abruptly, without warning. The men chanted the words almost beneath their breath;

I have heard them sing many times, but never a word could I ever distinguish.

There was a little subdued talk and laughter, but they seemed embarrassed by our presence. One brought out a kerosene lantern and placed it on the long bench which was to serve as our bed, then gave us a muttered "*Buenas noches, caballeros*," and disappeared silently from the feeble circle of light.

We passed a restless night. Between *garrapatas* and tiny red insects like those of the stable at Santa Rosa we had few idle moments, and we sprang from the infested couch at the first red streak of dawn upon the lake. The *peones* were already setting out for the field and they filed past us for a solemn handshake, each man murmuring a smiling "*Adios, caballeros*."

Four reales the cook set as the price of our lodging and *comida* of the night before, and for the same amount (in Nicaragua, since American intervention, a real is the equivalent of ten centavos and the centavo equals the American cent) she brought us fried eggs, chopped venison and rice, sugared nutcakes and excellent coffee, with white sugar and fresh milk!

There was only one egg in the kitchen when we came out for breakfast, so the cook's young son was set to watch a hen on a nest beneath the rear verandah. He squatted down a few feet from her with an expression of intense interest upon his round brown face and stared her in the eye as if intending to hypnotize her. There were several false alarms, but at last the hen set her mind to business and the *muchacho* dashed in triumphantly, bearing the warm trophy.

The foreman changed an American ten-dollar note for *billetes* of the republic, giving us cordoba for dollar, for in Nicaragua, owing to the financial arrange-

ments of certain New York bankers, the native is saddled with a monetary system too high for his mode of living. The *cordoba*, or *peso*, is of equal value to the silver dollar of the United States—until one desires to change it for American currency. Then exchange of from ten to twenty per cent. is demanded.

The foreman directed us to the trail for Rivas, and we set out at a brisk jogtrot, heading over narrow paths through thick jungle, as on the day before. It was nearly noon when we came to the Royal Highway, which, as usual, little deserved so grandiloquent a title. It was only a bridlepath threading a leafy glade, bordered by clumps of bamboo withered and clanking like iron bars in the slight breeze, of wild banana, and filled with fallen trees, from the trunks of which sprouted grotesquely formed parasitic *cacti*. The larger trees along the road, such as the dense-foliaged matapala, were encircled by wreathing vines which had spiralled up the trunk and cut deeply into the bark, giving the tree the appearance of a cask bundled into an over-tight net.

Noon found us still trotting along this jungle-trail and we had passed no houses since leaving Sapoá. All was unbroken wilderness about us ; matapalas, pachotes, scrub-mahogany, cedars, patches of bananas and bamboo and scrubby thorn-bushes, with an occasional coco-palm standing in solitary grace upon a hilltop. We halted beside a shallow water-hole and bathed, while the horses grazed over the sparse grass, then rode on again.

The weary animals moved at a dispirited walk all afternoon over a land baked to stonelike hardness by the flaming sun, until at four o'clock we came by many a twist and turn back to the shores of the Gran Lago.



A passing horseman called it three hours' ride to Rivas, so we stopped at the Hacienda Puerto and hat in hand approached the kitchen door.

Experience had taught us that in asking for food or lodging in these countries one may safely eliminate the man of the house from the calculation. So I made my request directly to the cook. She protested that there was nothing in the house fit for Yanques to eat, but, under the spell of my most involved Castilian, brought out gourds of fresh milk, boiled plantains, black beans and a mound of fresh cheese, which replaces butter on the table of the poor.

She hesitated visibly when asked the score, then murmured diffidently, "*Quince centavos.*" Fifteen cents! After being smilingly charged three prices for everything in Costa Rica and being made often to feel like the proverbial poor relation into the bargain, the modest demands of these Nicaraguenses of the south came as a surprise indeed.

Beyond the house was a deep, narrow bight of the Gran Lago, upon which a native boatman did a thriving business of ferrying. We inquired of him the distance to Rivas and he assured us with many gestures that we would make it in two hours even if we rode slowly.

"*Un camino bonito!*" he called it, but we discounted his description of the trail as a "pretty road" some fifty per cent. because of his nationality. We swam the horses across the bight and continued up the shore. The swim seemed to revive the horses' flagging spirits wonderfully. They went at a brisk singlefoot up the sandy beach, breaking into a gallop now and then as we faced a long, clear stretch of hard sand, clearing great logs like hunters, as if seven hours of weary jungle-travel didn't lie behind their hoofs. So we went on through the



cool of early evening and found, to our vast surprise, that the road was all the ferryman had proclaimed it.

For most of the way we followed the shore of the lake, with the wavelets lapping at the horses' fetlocks. Much to their disgust—neither had seen open water before, I fancy—we rode them belly-deep into the water and ceremoniously dipped up a cupful. We had been drinking lake-water, when we drank at all, for two days, but this was the first time we had drunk directly from the Gran Lago.

San Francisco's famous beach-road cannot surpass in beauty this ride at twilight along the shores of Lake Nicaragua. Indeed, I found it hard to realize that we weren't galloping along the Pacific near Golden Gate Park; only the sight of Mount Asero's cloud-wreathed summit across the water brought home to me the fact that we were on a Nicaraguan trail, else I should have been looking for the Seal Rocks and the Cliff House.

Our lasting impression of Rivas will be one of white road shining dimly in the darkness, with the scent of clean grey dust in our nostrils. After three hours of steady riding a cluster of lights twinkled far ahead through an opening in the trees and we spurred the horses onward.

Rivas was the scene of William Walker's last appearance on the Nicaraguan stage, the place where, on May 1st, 1857, he surrendered himself and the Falange to Captain Davis of the American sloop-of-war *St. Mary's*. Here he had held off for three months the combined armies of the Five Republics; not many feet of the adjoining country but had seen the fighting of his reckless, straight-shooting soldiers; the town itself had been in turn the outpost of his forces and those of his foes. So it had for us a peculiar interest. Too, it was

credited with three thousand inhabitants and an ice-plant, and we were anxious to investigate the truth of the latter report.

We unsaddled in the street outside the Hôtel Central and left the animals to be led away by a small boy, who had been our guide to the hostelry, while we limped stiff-legged into a big, tile-floored room where—pleasant sight after days of hand-to-mouth existence in the Guanacaste—two canvas cots spread with snowy sheets awaited our tired bodies.

We washed away some of the grime from faces and hands, then turned uptown and stopped with the crowd before a moving-picture exhibition held in one of the larger stores of the place. Here were ancient, wrinkled women, who had set up tables in the street to vend fried plantains, little iced cakes and the tiniest of meat-pies.

The sight of a cordoba bill came near to paralysing the old woman from whom we purchased cakes and she called in the capital of her fellow-vendors to provide change. The "sights" of the town were soon exhausted when we had seen the old church and the plaza, so we went back after half an hour of wandering to the hotel. Here the landlady, spite our protests that we had already eaten, had set a light meal for us. Since it included coffee, of which we had seen far too little in the past few days, we managed to eat again.

The landlady, a Nicaraguensa of better degree, entertained us as we sat at table, and from her we learned that the steamer plying the waters of the Lago between San Jorge—the village a couple of miles east of Rivas—and Granada, affectionately and possessively referred to by natives of the region as "*Nuestro Vapor Muy Grande*" ("Our Very Big Steamer"), had gone upon the beach a few days before and was now undergoing repairs. So it

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remained for us to make our way by road to Granada, sixty miles north of Rivas.

As we sat in our room after the meal it occurred to us that a cool drink would be very welcome. So we sent a boy after iced beer. He was gone so long that we went to investigate, and we found him in the kitchen, sitting upon the floor, with two bottles of *cerveze* clasped between his knees, gravely rubbing the outside of the bottles with a large lump of ice! Not yet is *hielo* fully adopted into the life of the people, it seems.

The finger-tips of Civilization have touched Rivas. We were sharply awakened next morning by a series of terrific explosions in the street near to the hotel. Since my dreams had been concerned with Walker and his exploits, particularly with the assault upon the garrison by the "Allies," it is hardly surprising that the uproar fitted into the dream, and that I found myself standing in the middle of the floor with six-shooter cocked, prepared to defend the room to the last shell. But it was only the usual racket attending the departure of the automobile-stage for Granada. Judging from the sound of the exhaust, some enterprising Yanque had palmed off his '08 or '09 touring car on a citizen of Rivas.

It was nearly dawn, the pleasantest hour of the day in that blazing land. We opened the street door and looked out upon a town softened in outline by a cool, grey haze that was in part mist from the Lago. The *lechero*—the milkman—rode past upon a scrawny pony, with pipe-stem legs thrust straight out between the four great milkcans that burdened his beast. Next in the regular procession of daily events came the civic water-cart, a large, galvanized-iron tank set upon an ox-cart. This vehicle stopped at almost every door and the driver drew off cans of water for the households.

Our breakfast couldn't have been bettered—in quality—even by a San Francisco chef. The *mozo* brought in a broad tray, laden with oranges, Parker House rolls with excellent butter, scrambled eggs, jam and *café con leche*. We ate in the dining-room opening upon the flower-scented patio of the house, where the morning breeze came in to ruffle the snowy tablecloth.

Our conversation with the landlady the night before, concerning, among other topics, the Nicaraguan Canal, seemed to have given the Rivasites the impression that we were somehow connected with that unfortunate enterprise. The other breakfasters glanced curiously in our direction as they entered the dining-room, while one gimlet-eyed *hombre* posted himself at the door to stare at us while we ate, and upon our return to our room took up station across the street where he could watch us saddle the nags for departure.

It is still a subject of engrossing interest to Nicaraguenses, this canal which was never dug. In the early nineties, when it seemed that the trans-continental waterway would surely cross Central America from Brito on the Pacific to Greytown on the Caribbean, speculators, both native and foreign, bought up all the land they could get hold of along the proposed route. Now they, or their descendants, cling to these arid acres which were once potential fortunes. They refuse to believe that the canal will never be dug; with an optimism almost pitiful they hang on to the land, discussing with anyone who will listen the many advantages of this route over that of Panama. Every wandering white man is a surveyor, no matter what he may say to the contrary. So they follow him about, eager for some clue which will more firmly establish them in their dreams.

Edna lagged noticeably as we left the town, but



mustered up enough energy to shy at the confusion of the market-place, filled with herds of horses and cattle, loaded ox-wains and natives of both sexes and all ages, each with something to sell.

The highway toward Granada was both broad and smooth, bordered on the right by tall trees. For the first few miles it was crowded with wayfarers on horse-back or afoot, bound for the market at Rivas. Sturdy, barefooted men in straw hats with high, peaked crowns, and loose *camisas* of canary yellow or brilliant blue hanging over their trousers, passed us singly and in groups. Slim, straight-backed girls in gaudy reds, yellows and greens strode past with never a glance to right or left, carrying upon their *mantilla*-shrouded heads baskets of vegetables and fruits, or great earthen jars. Like all the peoples which bear burdens on the head, these women walked with splendid grace, shoulders well back, arms swinging vigorously and rhythmically, deep chests rising and falling evenly. In all the travelers we met the Indian strain was strong, evidenced in the dark, chocolate-red colouring, the high cheekbones, thin lips and beady black eyes. They seemed sullen, after the bubbling cheerfulness of the Costaricense.

After a few miles of this pleasant jogging, the houses with their patches of bananas, bamboo or pasture-land were not so frequent. Long, arid stretches of scrub timber replaced the cultivated tracts, with white and brown squirrels and tiny weaver-birds playing in the branches of the low trees.

We passed Belen, a long, straggling village of white-washed adobe houses stretching for a mile or more along the road, and came at noon to a large farm-house set in a little clump of trees, with a well and water-trough for stock.





SOME OF THE WEARERS OF THE ANCIENT WOODEN MASKS, NICARAGUA.



ANOTHER VIEW OF MASKED CELEBRANTS, NICARAGUA.



Here we halted for the noon meal. We ate by turns, for the establishment boasted of but one knife, one fork and one spoon, and Norm had drawn the fork. It has always been difficult for me to eat with a knife with any degree of comfort to myself or the onlookers, so I waited until Norm was done, then attacked in my turn a huge plateful of rice and beans.

At two o'clock we pushed on, with Edna trailing at the uttermost end of the forty-foot lariat fixed to Norm's saddle-horn, while I walked on ahead. From time to time we stopped, and usually, as we sat beside the road smoking, passengers in ox-carts would pause to stare at us. Few of them would speak; they merely took their fill of staring, then the carts creaked on.

At sundown we turned aside to a house beside the trail, near the Rio Tenedor, and asked hospitality. The man of the house gave surly consent, so we piled saddles and *alforjas* upon the verandah, and the woman of the house, as surly and taciturn as her man, set out for us the usual rice, black beans and *tortillas*, with gourds of cold, foaming *pinole*.

Throughout the length of Nicaragua—save on the very border of Costa Rica—the people gave grudging hospitality, but never refused outright. The poorer class of the country is poor indeed, and despite their hatred of white faces, which seems to be the most deeply rooted instinct in every Nicaraguan, cupidity outweighed racial animosity.

We were utterly ignored by the family when we had eaten, and as soon as darkness had come we spread the blankets upon the tiled floor of the verandah. Came the sound of a girl inside the house telling her beads in a shrill wail as if bemoaning some monstrous sin, the fretful crying of a baby and from far off toward

the Gran Lago the muttered rumbling of a congo. Then sleep at last.

We had coffee and cold *tortillas* at the first crimsoning of the eastern sky next morning, sitting at a rough table facing a wall papered with pictures cut from English and American illustrated journals. It was odd to see the pure Indian features of the girl who served us, silhouetted against the white paper beside a photograph of Elsie Janis (upon whom be the peace!).

Our host was no more cordial than he had been the night before, so we saddled the horses, paid our score of six reales and rode slowly on toward Granada. Edna managed an alternate running-walk and foxtrot without displaying exceeding distress, which relieved our minds concerning her condition. We were content to ride quietly along the dusty, rutted road over the green-brown country, watching the grey and black monkeys swinging head downward in the scrubby trees as they chattered facetiously among themselves, or turning in the saddle to start up with a yell a flock of brilliantly coloured macaws which had been perched like disreputable buccaneers on a fence-rail.

As we jogged along the dusty *camino*, bordered alternately by the light green of the cane-fields and the darker emerald of banana-plantations, past thatched huts and primitive sugar-mills, we caught up with and passed many groups of surly *hombres*, striding dourly along, each with his little bundle of possessions dangling from the end of the naked-bladed machete he carried over his shoulder.

These fellows neither gave nor returned greeting, and once, when two had halted in the middle of the narrow track, I was forced to ride so near one that my right *alforja* brushed his back. Even then he made no move

to let me pass; instead, he whirled with a guttural snarl and fingered his vicious blade suggestively.

In deference to the advice given us by men familiar with Nicaragua, we hadn't attempted to get official permits to carry firearms such as we had been granted in Costa Rica. We had been told that our revolvers would be confiscated by the authorities if we wore them openly, so they were packed in the *alforjas*. Thought of their inaccessibility came to me very suddenly at sight of that razor-edged machete, unsheathed, three feet in glittering blade-length and full four inches wide.

So I touched Edna with the rowel and she leaped on past the *mozo*, knocking him sprawling. Twenty feet away and facing him, I dug out the white-handled Colt from the saddle-bag and grimly buckled it on. Norm, turning in the saddle to learn the reason for my delay, silently followed suit. We decided that, since it was necessary to play an "Old West" rôle to secure free passage of the highways, we would risk running afoul of the *policía*.

A mile farther we had reason to be thankful for our arming. A group of *peones*, seven or eight in number, had sprawled in the grass at the roadside. A large flask passed freely, and as we approached two men rose and sauntered into the middle of the narrow way, standing as if they had merely paused for an instant. Their companions were grinning expectantly, in anticipation of the jest, it seemed.

We were riding stirrup-to-stirrup now, and when directly before the men they moved almost imperceptibly so that they filled the path completely. Apparently, they expected to force us aside into the broken, rutty ditch. But Norm was beginning to show his war-grin and suddenly, with a Comanche yell, he jerked



his six-shooter from the holster and fired twice in air, clapping spurs to Twopercent at the same time. I followed suit, and Edna, frightened by the gunfire, charged down upon the *hombres* with teeth bared savagely.

The result was ludicrous. The would-be jokers tarried not upon the order of their going, and as we rode on grinning, cleaning the guns, we could see them still streaking across the fields as if the ghosts of Walker and all his Falange were at their heels.

After that it was only necessary to hitch the guns forward where they could be seen readily and we were accorded our half of the road. The travellers we met regarded us respectfully, if not cordially, for in Central America the native has a vast respect either for a white man or a six-shooter, and when the two are combined he walks softly around. Personally, in Nicaragua, where the natives look upon any white man with almost fanatical hatred, I would rather have my Colt than a safe-conduct signed by all the presidents from William Walker to Chamorro.

At noon we rode into a town of thatched huts and white-fronted adobes, rejoicing in the musical name of Nandaime. It was another spot bringing memory of Walker, for with his blue-shirts he had marched through this village, camping near it, when en route from Granada to make an attack upon Rivas.

In a little restaurant on the outskirts of the town we joined a company of wayfarers at a meal of beans and rice, then lounged in the patio until the animals had finished their maize. Granada was only seventeen miles farther, we were told, so at two o'clock, when the midday heat had somewhat subsided, we pushed on. A slight drizzle laid the dust and brought welcome

coolness to the air, and the horses kept up a steady foxtrot.

Never a stream did we see during the entire afternoon. The people of this region depend entirely upon wells for their water, even for that with which they irrigate their tiny cornfields. These wells are usually very deep, some of them drilled half a thousand feet through solid rock. They are consequently expensive, so proprietary, undertakings. Each well had its keeper, who collected from the people for the water they carried away.

At such a well we watched a team of patient bullocks treading round a rude spindle, which wound up the well-rope and drew a hundred-gallon iron bucket to the surface, where it was dumped—by a trigger also operated by the oxen—into a big, cemented trough to fill the water-cans of the women and boys who came with pack-animals for water. It required twenty minutes by the watch for the huge can to rise to the well-lip.

We paid our toll of two centavos for the water consumed by the horses and ourselves, then, as we waited for the well-keeper to give us change, discovered a glass jar of crude candy in the well-house. No one who hasn't experienced the dearth of sweets that marks Central American travel can imagine with what avidity we fell upon that stock of candy. We bought eighteen centavos' worth and rode off with the prize wrapped in sheets of old newspaper, leaving the well-keeper agape with the magnitude of our purchase.

At the well we had been assured that we would arrive in Granada at half-past five, but so used were we by now to the marvellous flexibility of Central American time—a subject worthy of a book by itself, for down there the people crowd at least forty-eight hours into

the shortest day, by the most conservative reckoning—that we regarded this statement as but a pleasant fiction. We “expected the worst and hoped for the best,” in the words of the negro reverend.

But at four-thirty, through an opening in the foliage like a casement in the jungle-wall, we glimpsed the Gran Lago, with the cathedral of Granada near-by. Edna was stumbling constantly over the inclines and twists of the *camino* and she chose this instant to fall full length in the thick dust, throwing me over her head face downward. When I got up it was with clothes white as a miller’s.

We jogged on toward the outskirts of the picturesque Moorish-Spanish-Nicaraguan city, risen phoenix-like on the site of the old city destroyed by Walker in December 1856, and marked by the significant proclamation “*Aquí fue Granada!*” (“Here was Granada!”). Nineteen thousand inhabitants, the atlas-makers acknowledge to the town, and from its extent as we rode through it, accompanied by numerous other passengers on horse- or mule-back, we could credit the estimate.

We inquired our way to the Hôtel Sultana, recommended to us by the restaurant-keeper in Nandaime, and were welcomed hospitably by the landlord, an elderly, well-educated Spaniard from Madrid (so he told us with vast pride almost before we had dismounted). He led the way into a huge bedroom where we piled our gear upon the tiled floor. As we unrolled our blankets the landlord reappeared at the street door, leading, with an expression of the utmost seriousness, the horses from the sidewalk into our *dormitorio*. For a moment we thought he expected us to sleep with our steeds in the fashion of story-book Arabs, but he only meant to take them—Edna stepping daintily upon the

slippery tiles—through the room and into a courtyard beyond.

After splashing away the dust of travel under a rude shower-bath in the courtyard we sat down to an excellent meal of many courses in the patio. There was a wandering quack doctor upon my left, proprietor of a variety of wonderful mud pills which he claimed were infallible remedies for a tremendous printed list of infirmities of flesh and mind. When he discovered that we were members of the unspeakable Yanque tribe, he began to preach a holy war, waving his knife cutlass-wise to punctuate his anti-American tirade. We managed to insult him into comparative silence (the soup course was past) and finished our meal in peace.

Twilight brought out the promenaders in plaza and main streets. The younger generation of Granada seemed much addicted to American and European styles. The youths were in blue serge coats and white trousers and shoes, with stiff straw hats or panamas of orthodox variety. We came upon two fellow-countrymen in the bar of the Alhambra and they volunteered to show us the matchless beach-road of Granada, *en automobile!*

The road twists and turns with the shore of the Gran Lago, and the view of the purple-black reaches of the Lake, with the white moonlight reflected in a long pathway across the still water, is all that it is claimed. But the road had *not* been designed for automobiles and the driver betrayed a naïve ignorance of the effects of a spill over a cliff. We enjoyed the drive, but it was with relief that we climbed out again without scars to show for the trip.

Midnight came while we sat over iced drinks, with the ghostlike figures of the townspeople drifting past our



table, and an orchestra somewhere in the mellow distance waking thoughts of other nights. One of the Americans wished to buy Edna and my saddle, which we had decided to dispose of, in preparation for the next stage of our journey.

With a lantern borrowed from the old woman who kept the *pulquería* Norm and I turned back toward the Sultana, startled, now and then, by the jack-in-a-box appearance of a policeman popping out of a dusky doorway to eye us suspiciously before he vanished into his hole again.

The racking cough of the quack doctor in the adjoining room—who was, perhaps, above his own remedies—roused us at dawn. After coffee Norm saddled Two-percent for the ride to Managua, sixty-four kilometres distant, leaving me to dispose of Edna and follow by train.

With the two Americans I whiled away the Sunday morning, in the poverty-stricken market-place, which reminded me more of the scenes of Mexico than the collections of prosperous shops in Costa Rican towns.

Granada's immaculate young men looked askance at my khakis, boots and Stetson when I went to breakfast in the Alhambra with my new acquaintances. "*Minero*," they said to one another, and their glances seemed to ask why I should appear in working-clothes in their midst. There is no more thorough cosmopolite than the Latin, even though his father may be wandering, barefooted and with his shirt-tail dangling, somewhere in the immediate background.

Having completed the details of the sale of Edna and my riding-gear that evening, we sat on the verandah of the Alhambra and listened to the band-concert in the plaza across the street. Presently all the white colony



of the town came drifting up, to lounge in the big cane chairs and chat slowly, in lazy, drawling phrases, of life in the Five Republics. We numbered seven in all and the hours slipped past without our marking them, until it was midnight and time to say both good night and good-bye.

Once more, this time without the friendly lantern to light a course along the four-foot curbings of the streets, I alarmed the drowsing policemen as I made my way through the deserted, unlit *calles* to the Sultana, to hammer upon the door until the landlord, with head and face wrapped like a Bedouin's against the "dangerous" night air, appeared to admit me.

After breakfast next morning, when I had paid our score, I was waited upon by three Jamaican negroes, who had halted me in the street the day before to beg alms. They formed themselves into a guard of honour; one called a carriage, while the others bore my *alforjas* to it when it arrived. I distributed three reales among them, leaving them with broad expanses of white teeth splitting the jet of their comical faces, and the driver whipped up his lanky nags for the railway station on the other side of Granada.

There was a surging, shrieking mob about the ticket-window. Each individual waved his or her money in the air and screamed the name of the station of destination. My toes were trampled upon and my clothing disarranged as I stood helplessly on the outskirts of this assembly. So I brought modern football tactics into play and dived into the crowd, to emerge a few moments later with weaving elbows, very much dishevelled of appearance, but clutching triumphantly a *tiquete* to Managua, which had cost exactly one centavo for each of the sixty-four kilometres.

The usual mixed gathering filled the coach I entered. There were planters and their numerous progeny; a padre, very sleek, well-nourished and content with life as the Church made it; a piggy-eyed doctor whose embonpoint rivalled that of the priest; the *comandante* of a little pueblo just outside Granada, whom we had seen two nights before on a spree; and two perfumed and giggling ladies of the most ancient profession, with great showing of paste jewellery around their heavily powdered necks. To these the *comandante*—not yet sober—paid impartial court.

At Masaya, a city of thirteen thousand inhabitants lying between Granada and the capital, the train waited at the station (or so it seemed to me) for belated passengers. There was a religious *fiesta* in full blast and the streets were jammed by swaying, applauding, not-too-sober crowds. Processions of celebrants went up and down, weirdly dressed figures with masks, some of which, I was told, were very ancient. In one of the streets a chanting group were performing a queer dance; the dancers, also, wore the wooden masks, and skins of *jaguar* and *león* hung down their backs.

As we waited for the train to move, a procession of women and children filed through the coach carrying trays of oranges, bananas, candy, cheap native-made toys, tobacco and cooked food. For five centavos I purchased a dozen slim, brown cigarettes and a box of Japanese safety-matches. No sooner had I produced the money than I was assailed by a group of loathsome beggars, old men and women in filthy rags, afflicted with every disease and deformity I had ever seen except leprosy. They were led by small boys and girls who begged for their charges in the professional whine of the alms-seeker the world over.

A greasy mechanic wiped out an axle-box of the little oil-burning locomotive and repacked it, and when he had finished the engineer set the echoes quivering with his whistle. We moved forward ten feet, perhaps, to halt with a sudden jerk before a pig which had paused upon the track to look in every direction and decide the trend of its future movements.

A sandalled *hombre*, of meek and resigned countenance, followed humbly after the pig, in his hand the end of a rope attached to the porker's hindleg. We waited until the pig had charted its course, then drew slowly out of the station.

The point which impressed me most was the subordination of everything else to that pig's whimsies. The loungers on the station platform watched the pig and follower with the utmost interest; the engineer leaned from the cab-window and waited calmly; even the passengers betrayed no irritation at the delay. All seemed to recognize the Irish tendencies of the pig-tribe and sympathize with the luckless *mozo* doomed to trail in the porker's wake.

At Masaya a huge Nicaraguense lawyer had bestowed his bulk in the narrow seat beside me. From there to Managua he wallowed restlessly as he held animated conversation with the two ladies of the profession in the seat behind, who had been deserted by the *comandante*. I was crushed between his dreadnought-like sides and the coach-wall, and with his every wriggle came near to being thrust bodily out of the open window. But I was revenged.

My oil-tanned boots had accumulated a thick coat of grey dust during the ride to Granada, and I kept them moving painstakingly against the attorney's white flannel trousers. The effect was all that I could have

desired and thereafter I kept my feet working steadily. When my seatmate disembarked at Managua it afforded me keen pleasure to note the zebra pattern of his trousers-legs and I reflected with placid malevolence upon the ineradicable nature of those markings.

At a tiny station outside Masaya came interruption to our journey : a sturdy, full-bosomed woman had entered the first-class carriage and planted herself solidly in the aisle, leaning back against the edge of the seat. The conductor asked for her *tiquete*, and after inspecting the pasteboard informed her that she could ride only in the second-class coach. She shook her head and set her grim mouth in a straighter line. The conductor expostulated ; she ignored him. Passengers explained to her that second-class *tiquetes* entitled one only to second-class accommodations ; she seemed not to hear.

At last the conductor lost patience with her. He reached above his head and yanked the whistle-cord, and the train stopped with the suddenness of a bullet striking against a wall, the locked wheels screaming as they slid over the light rails. Then the conductor informed the rebel that here the train remained until she took her proper seat in the second-class carriage. She held out for ten minutes by the lawyer's fat watch, then, very sullenly, gathered up her numerous bundles and went forward.

As a dabbler in psychology I found the scene interesting. Here, as in the case of the pig, there was perfect calmness. Once the conductor decided that she knew her proper place he wasted no further arguments upon her, nor did the passengers. Not a hand was laid upon her ; not a threat was made. With beautiful placidity all hands prepared to remain in that spot for the rest of their natural lives—or so it seemed—if the woman





NICARAGUAN SENTRY ON DUTY, CAMPO DEL MARTE, MANAGUA.



ANCIENT MAYAN POTTERY FROM OMETEPE ISLAND, LAKE NICARAGUA.





refused to take her seat with the other second-class passengers.

The country grew more thickly settled toward the capital, and past La Primavera, a tiny station set down forlornly in the middle of a bare, brown plain, with nothing springlike about it except its name, came the first glimpse of Lake Managua, a smaller, more picturesque body of water than its sister-lake, the Gran Lago, with which it is connected by the Rio Tipitapa. We debouched from a narrow, house-lined street into the open *estación* of Managua ; Norm waved in the background, and, after a final, gloating glance at the attorney's striped trousers, I elbowed through the crowd to where he waited.

## CHAPTER V

### MANAGUAN IDLINGS

CAPITAL OF NICARAGUA—SELLING “TWO PERCENT”—WALKER,  
“THE KING OF THE FILIBUSTERS”—NATIVE POLITICS—FOREIGN  
COLONY OF MANAGUA—MOSQUITOES DE LUXE—READY FOR THE  
LONG TRAVERSE—NORTH AGAIN.

TOWNS, countries, peoples, each inspires individual observers with conflicting emotions. So one man's opinion of a country or a city can stand for little more than that—his private opinion. Since my return to the States I have read, with keen interest, Richard Harding Davis's impressions of the capital of Nicaragua and find that I differ with him on almost every point. This may be because it was a good many years ago that Davis visited Central America, or, more probably, for the reason I have just set down—the difference in view-point of two individuals. The safest thing a traveller can do, it seems, is to describe things as he sees them, giving (as Davis did most ably) some account of the emotions awakened by the sight, then let the reader analyse, eliminate, expand, decide for himself.

When my *alforjas* had been deposited in the room Norm had taken at the “Grand Hotel of Lupone,” we settled down at a table in the front garden of the hotel, where we could discuss over tall, frosted glasses the people in the street before us—or any other subject of interest.

There was but little wind that day and consequently very little of the whirling dust that distresses the town's population ordinarily. A high breeze brings dancing dust-devils worthy of the Great Sahara or—El Paso, Texas.

A visit to the American Ministry, a two-story building almost hidden behind a luxuriant tropical garden, with a most business-like marine sentry in the hallway, left us feeling very much like wanderers and orphans, for Mr. Jefferson, the Minister, had received no mail for us. We chatted with him for awhile, and when we left, it was with the opinion that the Minister was a man with whom secrets of State might very safely be deposited.

Our way back to Lupone's took us past the "White House" of Nicaragua, a square building of the usual two stories, which might have been the residence of any fairly prosperous citizen, and was far less imposing in appearance than the quarters of Mr. Jefferson. It was set almost at the edge of the sidewalk, and the only official touch was the slouchy sentry pacing up and down the hallway and the throng of waiting people, which seemed to be drawn from all classes of the citizenry, in the waiting-room. Chamorro, the President, to whom I had a letter of introduction, is the veteran revolutionist of Central America, and something of the informality of his twenty years of camp-life seems to mark his official existence.

In the hotel we became better acquainted with the waiter, an individual clad in orthodox white jacket to the belt, but strikingly Nicaraguan of cascading trousers-legs and broad bare feet, and with divers Americans and Britons visiting or residing in the capital. For Lupone's is the gathering-place of the foreign colony; those

who do not live beneath its roof make daily pilgrimage to the long table set under the trees outside the bar door.

Here it was that first we encountered—in Central America, I mean—the Anglo-Saxon dread of losing caste. It was a British mining-man who, upon learning that we planned the “long traverse” from Managua to Guatemala, inquired politely whether we would ride horses or mules.

“Neither,” replied Norm, with politeness equalling that of the questioner. “We intend to walk—go *a pié*.”

“You’re going to—*walk*!”

Norm grunted assent.

“But, surely,” said our new acquaintance, “you’ll have three or four *mozos* to carry your luggage?”

He could understand that, Americans being so different in view-point from their cousins across the water, we might be possessed by an insane fancy to ride Shanks’s mare over jungle- and mountain-trails; and so long as we had a few natives to boss, the dignity of the race would in some degree be protected.

“Nary *mozo*,” Norm assured him with a grin. “What we’ll take with us can be packed in a hammock-roll and carried over the shoulder. So why worry with *mozos*?”

“But, my *dear* chaps!” he protested. “What will the natives think? Imagine it! A white man on foot and carrying his baggage! Why—why, it will destroy the idea we have worked for years to impress upon them, that of the superiority of the white man to the native. Why—why, it’s unthinkable! Have you chaps no idea of *caste*?”

Norm tried to explain to him our entire indifference to the silent opinion of, and complete ability to deal sharply and efficiently with the spoken contempt from, any native or natives. But I fear his efforts were in



vain. While the others about the table smiled behind their hands, the mining-man sputtered and choked with his overwhelming emotion until he was forced to leave the company. Until our departure from Managua he withdrew the hem of his garments, so to say, from possible contamination by association with men who *walked*.

But very few of the foreign colony—not one per cent. of it—were asses. There were men sitting around that long table who had made—and lost—a half-dozen fortunes each by methods that would read more interestingly than fiction, could they be chronicled. There were others who had been the trusted advisers of half the revolutionists of Central America; men who had reached Guatemala by the Old Trail from Arizona to Vado Ancho on their own feet; oil-scouts and mining-engineers to whom the world was their back-yard; timber-cruisers and out-and-out seed of Ishmael who couldn't "stay put" in one place; and from these we had nothing but friendly advice and sympathetic interest. They were "real people," in the phrase of the south-west.

All this region possessed a dual fascination for me. Managua was not only the capital of Nicaragua, a city of thirty-five thousand anti-whites set down upon the brown, dusty plain that looked like a cake of chocolate on a lettuce-leaf. It was also part of the stage on which moved that American whose personality and exploits were such that they must live so long as boys—and men!—like to hear of deeds of derring-do.

William Walker, miscalled "filibuster"; Walker the American President of Nicaragua; Walker the shrewdest pro-slavery advocate of his generation; Walker the unafraid! Yet the encyclopædias dismiss him, his

achievements and his gallant end with a scant paragraph, to hurry on to the biography of some smug stay-at-home who, perchance, wrote a treatise on lawn-tennis. But if the history-books give him very little space, his name is still one to conjure with in Nicaragua and Honduras; it is as well known there as Washington's in the United States. This is in no way intended as a comparison between the characters of the two, but merely as illustration of the mark that Walker the lawyer-editor-doctor-empire-seeker, leader of forlorn hopes almost without a peer, made upon the people of an alien race.

It is as futile now to discuss the possible fate of the slave-monarchy Walker attempted to set up in Central America as to speculate concerning the result if the South had won the Civil War. But, however mistaken the man may have been, he possessed not only the courage of his convictions, but an audacity and faith in his star truly magnificent.

With a handful of blue-shirted, devil-may-care Americans he made himself President of Nicaragua and, incidentally, gave them the fairest government they had ever known. Doubtless he would have fulfilled his ambition to conquer the whole of Central America had it not been for the money-grabbing capitalists and weak-kneed politicians of his own land. If he had succeeded in merging these discordant units into a country extending from Mexico to Panama, as was undoubtedly his plan, it is hard to say what might *not* have resulted. It is an interesting, if useless, speculation, and certainly no American has reason to feel ashamed of his "filibustering" countryman.

In the afternoon of our first day in the capital, while I wandered through the market-place, Norm dickered

with Gunner White of the marine detachment for the sale of Twopercent. Finally he sold the sturdy little nag, with saddle and bridle and *garrapatas* and all else pertaining to the trail-mate of Edna. When I tired of wandering through the collection of shops—too modern to be of interest—which adjoined the big market, and went back to Lupone's, I found my *camarada* in our room with an intent expression and a huge roll of cordoba *billetes* which he was endeavouring to count. American saddlery is rare in the tropics and we found ourselves possessed of a profit on our sales!

After *comida* we joined the dozen or more men at the long table outside the bar door. The talk turned to Walker and to later adventurers in the Land of the Lotus. One member of the group had once been accused of tearing up the Nicaraguan flag—a trumped-up story to furnish excuse for an outbreak—and the accusation precipitated the revolution which resulted in the overthrow of the dictator Zelaya and the American intervention of 1912.

The effects of American intervention are very perceptible. The finances of the country are regulated by American bankers, who control the national bank and issue beautifully engraved banknotes; the national debt is held by New York financiers, who govern customs collections in the ports. A detachment of American marines, one hundred and fifty in number, keep undesired peace in the country.

An American told us, only half-jestingly, that when signs of unrest become apparent among the people, the marines have only to hold target-practice to check the natives' natural and inherent impulse toward outbreak. The Nicaraguenses come, watch the marines qualify as expert riflemen and pistol-shots, then go thoughtfully

home and mournfully pack away their weapons for the time.

Regrettable as it may seem that the United States has to dabble in the affairs of a supposedly sovereign country, there is no doubt but that withdrawal of the handful of khaki-clad policemen would be followed by serious disorders. The Central American cannot be treated as a grown-up; he is in much the same class as the small boy who goes upon the rampage and tears up everything in sight in a frenzy inexplicable to his elders.

Government, to the Latin American, is merely the machine for rewarding the top-dog, and to him it is perfectly proper to overthrow an existing regime with thrilling fireworks for no other reason than his desire for a slice of the governmental melon. Some day the native will learn how to organize modern political parties which will take turn and turn about at mismanaging affairs, to the profit of the party-members. Then the ballot will replace the bullet and we shall see among our dusky neighbours replicas of all the famous political institutions of the United States. But now, continuous peace bores Manuel and his friends almost to distraction.

It is foolish to speak of the Latin American as if his ideas of political economy were the same as ours. The Nicaraguenses are a case in point: under the restraining influence of a handful of khaki-clad marines they have—I almost said “enjoyed,” but that isn’t the proper word—had a peaceful existence for nearly eight years. Zelaya’s extortions from rich and poor by means of red-pepper injections and merciless floggings are no longer possible, yet on every hand one hears discontented mutterings from the native, directed at the “greedy white men” who have “seized” the country.

In my humble opinion Nicaragua would be another



Mexico were the marines withdrawn. If we had taken similar decided steps to protect American lives and property immediately south of the Rio Grande there would be no necessity for swallowing so many pointed insults, no reason for the transmission of polite diplomatic notes to decorate the waste-paper baskets of the various bandits who have taken turns at ruling the country. However, I am prejudiced in this matter—like most of the Americans who have lived along the Texas border since 1910.

The *Campo del Marte* (Field of War) in Managua is a large, walled parade ground, with towers for machine-guns commanding the streets leading into the town. The barracks, a battlemented structure, is one of the most ornamental buildings in all of Nicaragua. We found the Nicaraguan garrison occupying it jointly with the detachment of American marines.

Gunner White brought out the collection of ancient pottery and idols which is his hobby, with photographs of ancient rock-paintings secured from cliffs at risk of his neck. Some of the pottery was wonderfully smooth and well shaped, when one remembers that it dated from the ancient Mayas, and was manufactured by these primitive people long before the days of Cortez's conquest of Mexico. Among the collection we found water-jars and cooking-pans and, most interesting of all, squat, hideous idols from the Island of Ometepe, in the Gran Lago.

A brisk wind had sprung up and as we made our way back to Lupone's the dust was blowing in fantastic clouds and whirling figures higher than the red-tiled roofs of the city. The people who were on the streets were hurrying homeward with sleeve or *mantilla* over mouth and nostrils. This fear of breathing in the dust seems to be universal among the Latinized Americans; at least,



I have observed it in the peoples of all the countries from Mexico to Panama.

Inquiry as to the reason for their dread of the dusty breeze and of night air brings merely a shrug and the grunt, “*’sta malo*” (“it is bad”), as answer to the question.

As we sat in the dining-room that evening a tall, black-clad figure came in and we rose to give joyous greeting to Jerry Kingsbury, whom we had met and left in San José de Costa Rica. After the meal we drifted out, as usual, to the long table beneath the trees.

Of all the cities of Central America, our most pleasant memories—in spite of the surliness of the townspeople—are of Managua. It was the only one in which we really wished to linger. The friendly chats in the forenoons, when we lounged comfortably in the shady garden over iced *limonadas* and watched the people passing the hotel; the hour preceding “breakfast,” when all the foreigners in the capital gathered in this spot to laugh and exchange anecdotes of the day’s events and the poker-dice went the rounds of the table as we shook for drinks; it was all like the reunion of a big, congenial family. I’m willing to venture the assertion that—among the Americans, at least; the sober-minded English are more bound by custom—most of the business of the foreign colony was transacted at the long table under the trees, and the habit reacted to the benefit both of Lupone and the business.

But the evenings were the best. Then, while some distant band droned on interminably, we sat in velvety darkness which was intensified rather than lightened by the feeble electrics within the hotel, and our best stories came out for the edification of the company, while ice tinkled in the long glasses.

It was at these evening sessions that the "true inwardness" of many incidents came out, the queer tricks and turns of thought of the native, which result in actions inexplicable to the Anglo-Saxon unfamiliar with the tropics, but entirely natural, if not actually inevitable, to the Latin. In that atmosphere of languorous content many an event which had puzzled the diplomats of various nations was explained by men who had been eye-witnesses of, if not actors in, the play.

The principal drawback to residence in Managua, if one discounts the dust-storms, is the mosquito. To my mind these pests overshadow the fervid midday heat, the high, dust-laden winds, the dearth of amusements of civilized variety, even the surliness of the native.

Each night when we retired it was in the manner of a retreating army. We sought our room, snapped on the light for a brief instant to locate the beds, then snapped it off and leaped as quickly as possible beneath the canopy of mosquito-netting, there to undress while the hungry, singing legions tried every inch of the barrier in search of an entrance.

The netting on my bed was changed the day after our arrival, in the interest of cleanliness, I presume. But the clean canopy was ragged. Some of the holes had been darned, but near the top of the dome, where it was suspended from the ceiling by a cord, was a rent an inch or so in diameter. On the first night I slept beneath it I was besieged by a jubilant, chanting army, and only by smothering myself beneath the sheet could I escape their onslaught.

"Oh, the *mosquitos* aren't bad in Managua," said the Old-Timer one evening. "You should see 'em around Chinandega in the rainy season !

"Why, I remember that a traveller was once riding

along the trail toward Leon, and near a little cabin beside the road he had to halt, for he saw a dozen mosquitoes coming for him hellbent. Now, those birds are as big as cabbages, with beaks a foot long, so this *gunie* looked around for shelter.

"At the side of the cabin was a big, old-fashioned copper sugar-kettle some four feet in diameter by three and a half deep. He jumped off his mule and pulled the kettle over him.

"Well, gentlemen, those infernal hairpins clustered about the kettle, trying their ———est to pull it off the chap. When they couldn't handle it that way, they poked their beaks under the edge and tried to spear him. The fello' had a rock in his hand and every time a beak appeared he smashed it against the lip of the kettle—just cemented it to the lip, d'you see. He did this twelve times and those roosters, the twelve of 'em, were just wriggling with agony."

"Then what happened?" inquired the Young-Man-Just-Come-Down.

The Old-Timer rose, drained his glass and yawned ostentatiously. He didn't fancy the Young Man overmuch, anyway.

"Oh, the twelve of 'em flew away with the sugar-kettle," he drawled.

Wednesday morning after coffee and *pan dulce* we attempted to settle our score. But, like everything else in the tropics, this is a detail requiring mature deliberation, a ceremony not without a certain dignified leisureliness. The clerk requested us to return in the afternoon, and it was with difficulty that we drew him from his shell of hauteur with the information that our train left at ten o'clock.

"Then, why the devil don't you wait until ten?"

said the clerk's injured expression as plainly as any words could have done.

We had a round of errands to occupy the hours until train-time. There were friends to bid good-bye, purchases to be made, money to exchange. We went first to the marine-camp to give *adios* to our acquaintances there, then stopped at a bank. Here we found that, although Nicaraguan money is "the same as American," the bankers prefer the portrait of George Washington or some other well-known character from our gallery of famous men to that of a Nicaraguan patriot upon a bill. In short, the banks had no American banknotes to spare for strangers.

At the general merchandise shop of a canny Scot we received American gold-certificates in exchange for our bundle of cordobas, and were charged only ten per cent. for the service. Then, in the market-place, we looked for hammocks.

On the steamer going to New Orleans I found the work of another tropical traveller, in which mention is made of purchasing a hammock in Guatemala City for "a few cents." Either the Guatemalan hammock is inferior, vastly, to the Nicaraguan article or the wriggling tentacles of Business have rendered the merchants of Nicaragua sharper hands at bargaining. Our *hamacas*, with clews, stood us four dollars gold apiece, and the Chinaman seemed utterly indifferent about their sale.

Our account was almost closed when we got back to the hotel. We waited at the desk until the clerk had procured the signature of Señor Lupone himself beneath the "*cancelado*" which is the Spanish equivalent of "paid," then said good-bye hastily to our friends of the long table and bundled our packages into the rickety *coche* at the door.

The driver lashed his nags madly and we were off for the railway station at a furious walk. The usual shouting, gesticulating throng surged and scrambled about the ticket-window, and when mere Yanques objected mildly to being thrust aside and trampled upon, many were the black scowls upon the dusky faces.

But the attitude of the people we had met, both on the road and in the cities, had become so familiar to us that we paid very little heed to the frigidity of our greeting. So Norm brought his wide shoulders and weaving elbows into play and penetrated the crowd as a boring-machine enters soft earth. When he had brought back our tickets we strolled into the Chinandega train.



## CHAPTER VI

### JUNGLE TRAILS IN NICARAGUA

THE CHINANDEGA TRAIN—HATRED OF WHITE FACES—HALT AT LEON—A CHINANDEGAN TENOR—BATTLING MOSQUITO ARMIES—TORTILLA MAKING AND HISTORY—ON MEETING A "TIGRE"—HACIENDA JOTÉ AND HOSPITALITY—RED-TAPE AT PLAYA GRANDE—"GASOLINA" OF DELIVERANCE.

THE Central American has taken the railway to his heart. It is as familiar to him nowadays as the lowly mule, and he rides upon it, I do believe, more for recreation than anything else. In a land where time is least important of many unimportant elements, the native turns up his nose scornfully at the offer of a ten-mile ride in an ox-cart. Instead, he spends hard-got centavos for the ticket which permits him to squat in the crowded aisle of a narrow-gauge coach for the same trip.

We found the coaches of our train crowded when we entered. Norm dropped into a seat beside a fat, middle-aged woman, but I could get sitting-room only by removing from a cushion the possessions of a young, brazen-faced Nicaraguense and tossing them upon the luggage-rack overhead—where they belonged.

The *hombre* frowned at me heavily, and ostentatiously fingered his revolver-butt. Then Norm turned and—playing up nobly—looked at the cheap, nickel-plated weapon, and snickered. The youth began to swell with visible indignation, much to the wicked delight

of my *camarada*. Time after time he repeated the scene, each time with the same result.

The north-bound train traversed a flat, sunbaked, utterly arid *pais* upon which grew—for all the world like bristles upon a brown pig's back—scrubby, dust-coated thorn-bush. Here and there, near the railway, were tiny patches of bananas, maize, or feeble-looking sugarcane, watered by shallow wells. But after passing Lake Asososca, a dark-blue, irregularly shaped body of water lying in the crater of an extinct volcano, the cultivated areas were few. Lean cattle ranged apathetically upon the chocolate-coloured plain, herded by tattered *savoneras* on tiny ponies.

At noon we pulled into a little station, and the customary procession of women and children entered the coaches with their trays of lottery tickets, greasy food and bottles of lukewarm *cerveze*, the flat, sweetish native beer. Two small pies of mysterious content, purchased from the cleanest-seeming little girl for a real, with cakes of chocolate brought with us from the capital, made our midday meal.

In early afternoon we got our first glimpse of the volcano Momotombo, with Momotombita—"Little Momotombo"—near-by. At the distance from which we stared they seemed part of a line of volcanoes extending from Viejo to Momotombita all along our right. Momotombo appeared as an almost perfect cone, rising gently from an undulating base, and in the clear air a lazy crown of white vapour floated upward so slowly as to seem not to move. The other passengers seemed too familiar with the sight to glance that way, but until the train twisted the peaks out of sight we craned our necks and watched.

At Leon the train halted for twenty minutes and

several passengers disembarked, to be replaced by others bound for Chinandega and Corinto. We noted a lightening in the swarthy colouring of the people, but failed to observe any lessening of the hostility with which we were regarded. Even the slovenly woman who sold us glasses of *tamarinda*, a sickeningly sweet, insipid concoction of tamarind-juice and doubtful water, scowled as she handed the glasses up to us, scowled as we drank and when we paid, then spat as she tossed the tumblers into a wash-bucket with an emphasis that showed her opinion of the white race.

Among the girls and younger women on the train were some of the most beautiful I have ever seen. They resembled—and rivalled—the *hapi haoli* girls of Honolulu. They were as fair of complexion as any daughter of our own land, regular of features, with blue-black curly hair worn in a simple, attractive twist that fell to the waist, or an equally effective coil at the nape of the neck. But their dark eyes held no pleasantness for us! The Leonista is noted for his hatred of white men, and even Norm the Heart-Wrecker acknowledged defeat when his most admiring glances were ignored.

As we sat in the coach and stared through the window at the town of Leon, I experienced a peculiar sensation. There were we, almost within sight of the spot where two luckless Americans, machine-gunners in the revolutionary army, had been captured but little more than eight years before. They had been flayed alive and then hacked to pieces by the women of the city, and their remains devoured by the half-wild pigs in the streets.

Perhaps some of the elderly women now scowling at

us had wielded a machete that bloody day—*quién sabe?* When I looked at their beady, black eyes and thin, grim lips, this last surmise seemed anything but improbable. The touch of the big Texas six-gun nestled in its holster beneath my arm was as grateful in that moment as the handclasp of an old, tried friend. My reflections bred in me no love for these Indian-featured men and women, with their malevolent glances in our direction.

Past Leon the country was more thickly settled. There were larger areas of cultivation, but still the evidences of a long, blazing summer season gave the landscape a dreariness very different from the aspect of the broad, green fields and rank, verdant jungles of Southern Nicaragua and of Costa Rica.

We pulled into the station at Chinandega in late afternoon after our ninety-mile journey. There was no lodging-place near-by, so we followed a business-like *muchacho* through a mile of hot, dusty streets to the Hôtel Ibérico. The landlady was in the patio with her daughter and a well-dressed man of middle age, and they seemed annoyed at our coming. But a slovenly "Mary Ann" came from the kitchen and showed us to a room, and pointed silently across the patio to where a home-made sign indicated the bathroom.

Damp-haired, smooth-chinned, in clean clothing and so at peace with all the world—even Nicaragua—we worked at notes and maps and the sorting of our outfits. Then through the open street door came such a burst of melody as we had never heard in these lands. Across the blazing, dusty street a *colorado maduro*-complexioned youth was loading sacks of maize-ears into an ox-cart. Apparently, *trabajo* (for which the English synonyms are work, labour, toil, trouble!) had for him no such



terrors as for the remainder of Chinandega's *siesta*-ing inhabitants; he was singing blithely enough.

The ringing, boyish tenor drew us from maps and notes to listen to the simple little ballad about a *caballero* of Lima who loved a snow-white señorita. But he took the plaintive cadences of the *canción amor* and so embellished them with bird-like trills and a lilting rhythm that one yearned to commission him to rewrite all the mournful Spanish music of the Southland.

"Mary Ann" called us to *comida* in the patio, where we ate with dapper young clerks from the modernized shops, who looked superciliously at our boots and khakis. From the array of food upon the table, it seemed certain that the High Cost of Living had skipped this section of Nicaragua on its globe-girdling journey. There was soup, fried eggs, rice and *chilis*, chicken fricassée, black bean-paste, fried bananas, cottage cheese, *tortillas*, white bread and delicious preserved oranges and *café negro*. And room and board at the Ibérico, even at tourist-rates, was but one dollar per day.

When we had eaten we resumed our work of arranging the packs we intended to carry during the remainder of our journey. Our possessions were divided as evenly as possible and each of us enclosed his share in the seat of a spare pair of trousers. A drawstring through the belt-loops at the waist made a bag of the seat, while the legs, tied to the waistband by their bottoms, formed the shoulder-straps. Except only the blanket-roll, which is my favourite, the "overalls-pack" is the most comfortable rucksack that I have ever shouldered, and in my day I have swung up several styles of war-bag. When complete, our burdens weighed a fraction under eighteen pounds apiece, and this weight included hammocks and mosquito bars. Norm was to carry



the kodak at his belt, while I packed the joint canteen.

Had we risen at cockcrow on our first morning in Chinandega our rest would have been short indeed, for at midnight a belligerent cockerel in the hotel patio sent forth his brazen challenge. It was answered by every rooster in town and by most of the dogs, from the sound. But we merely rolled over on the comfortable canvas cots and slept until daybreak. After breakfast we strolled townward.

Many of the houses of Chinandega show a quaint, Moorish note in their architecture. Some of the white-washed, one-story *casas* have barred windows projecting from the house-wall like those I had seen pictured in old histories of Granada. Save only the railway station, it might have been a drowsing, peaceful town of Old Spain.

As we sauntered through the quiet streets, breathing in the coolness of the tropic morning, filled with deep content at merely being alive and on the trail, rather than in the bustle and clamour of an American city, we began to attract a following. From doorway, alley-mouth and mothers' skirts came the children, until we marched at the head of a miniature army. It was the kodak that drew them. "*Cámara! Cámara!*" they whispered to one another, and every time Norm halted to snap a picture all the children in buzzing chorus explained gravely to each other just why and how he did it.

We made diligent inquiry as to the trails out of Chinandega and received different advice from each *hombre* we accosted. It seemed to be a point of honour with the population to disagree with one another. If Pedro Gomez had advised us to head for Tempisque, then Antonio Garcia was certain we had best turn toward Playa Grande. But all were agreed that Honduras

was but an armed camp, in its southern part, and would afford no opportunity for unimpeded wandering such as we desired. Progress would be a march from one rebel camp to another, with the doubtful protection of a military escort—for which we would pay!

So we eliminated the "land of depths" from our itinerary and decided to strike out for Playa Grande, there to take passage on the weekly launch for La Union, Salvador. But by the time we had collected enough data to permit our departure, it was nearly sundown.

Our landlord desired our room for friends who had just arrived, and presented us with our bill. I explained to him that we had no intention of moving before the morrow, but he insisted that he had been informed that we would leave that day. We told him that it was now too late to start for El Viejo, three leagues distant, but in this he wasn't interested. He could rent our room and would be pleased to see our backs.

We assumed a "determined to stay" expression, in the face of his repeated protests, and finally were given *comida*. But the "welcome" sign on the Ibérico door-mat was turned face-down during the remainder of the evening. Our skins were thickening, however, so we ate placidly and well and retired to the *cuarto* entirely unworried by the host's coolness of manner.

Very early next morning, so early that the cook had not made coffee, we paid our score and slipped into the pack-straps, our "caste" left behind us with discarded *alforjas* on the floor, and set out for El Viejo. We had long since become accustomed to rousing fevered curiosity in the native mind, but apparently white men bearing back-packs were the greatest novelty in this region, for as we passed through the grey streets entire families rushed to the doors to see us out of sight.

We waded the muddy stream north of Chinandega and strode up the dusty road, now filled with country-folk coming in to market. Horsemen, farmers driving their oxen in from the *potreros*, women and girls with laden baskets on their heads, all stared at us with the expression of vacuous, yet subtly hostile, curiosity we had come to accept as the peculiar mark of the Nicaraguense of the north, whether male or female.

The soft road between the brown-green walls of scrub brought us in an hour to El Viejo, a heterogeneous clutter of pole-walled, thatched huts affronting the landscape. Of the six or eight houses of the village, four of them had something to sell, were *tiendas*. The fat mistress of the largest lost a shade of her sullen suspicion at sight of our roll of centavo *billetes*, and, when we had bought a dozen stony little rolls and two bananas, thawed out sufficiently to inquire our destination. She was greatly surprised to learn that we intended to make the journey to Playa Grande *a pié*, but shrugged her shoulders with the resigned air of the native confronted with *gringo* eccentricity.

A stupid-faced boy was the only occupant of the shack that served as post office. After a lengthy explanation, we drew from him the information that just then the post office had no stamps, "some would come from the capital soon—perhaps next month." Defeated here, we were turning toward the out-trail when the woman of the *tienda* hailed us. She had guessed our errand—perhaps its outcome—and she had stamps, three of them, which she would sell at only twice their face-value. We submitted to the extortion, dropped the letter into the wooden box outside the post office and—so far as we know—it may be there yet.

The trail, after chasing its tail in and about the shacks

of El Viejo, finally regained a measure of dignity and joined the *línea telegráfico* on the northward march just outside the village. White men had been before us ; we were assured of this when we passed a group of ragged, dirty urchins and heard the American fighting-word shouted after us as we went.

It was an arid, dreary land over which we tramped till noon, dust-coated, practically waterless, with but an occasional miserable hut beside the ragged trail. Swarms of mosquitoes and black flies tormented us as we walked and we were forced to keep folded handkerchiefs swinging constantly before our faces. When we halted at midday to eat our rolls and drain the canteen, the insect pests grew so troublesome that we slipped into the pack-straps and went on a mile farther to where a hut sat on the edge of the jungle.

Here we found a woman and two half-naked children and were given a gourdful of suspicious water. It was too hot to take up the march again ; not a breath of air stirred and the stony earth radiated a heat like that from a red-hot furnace. We clung to such thin shade as the hut-wall afforded and waited for afternoon. As we sprawled there the *peon* who was head of the family came in with his machete under his arm, ragged, bare-footed, apathetic, too hopelessly indifferent to engage in the most casual of conversations.

As I looked about the dirt-floored interior of the cabin, at the piled stones that sheltered the cooking-fire—upon which simmered an old tin pail of green plantains, the only food of any kind in the place—at the children sprawl among the flea-ridden *chuchos*, their scrawny bodies covered with festered mosquito-bites, at the whole squalid, indescribably dreary scene, I couldn't help comparing this family's lot with that of the most



shiftless, improvident negro family I had ever seen in my native Southland.

These people are the slaves of their environment, gripped by a primal apathy that holds young and old alike. They have fertile lands, but rather than scratch the surface and plant seed they—to employ the phrase of the hotel-keeper at Mazatlan—lie in the shade and scratch their empty bellies.

At a larger house a mile beyond the cabin an old woman was baking *tortillas*. For three centavos she sold us two, smoking-hot, fully a foot in width, but was horrified that we expected to find *frijoles* (beans) in her poor kitchen.

It is watching the women prepare *tortillas* that one realizes most readily the narrow space separating these people from the Indians the Spaniards enslaved. The *tortilla*-stone has undergone scarcely a modification in the past five hundred years.

Imagine a stone table two feet long by a foot wide, three or four inches thick, resting upon three stumpy legs, distinctly concave of top from end to end. Upon this is placed the hulled, boiled maize-kernel and reduced to a pulp under a stone-roller. Hot water is added and once more the pulp is rolled, until it becomes a sticky, flexible dough.

As the woman rolls the dough, a shallow iron bowl, fourteen to eighteen inches across, is heating upon the open fire. When this bowl is smoking-hot a small piece of dough, patted to a thin, flat cake by a rotative motion of the hands held against the breast, is placed upon the ungreased surface and baked to a yellow-brown colour.

The *tortilla* is never salted. Unless one not only orders salt, but stands over the *cocinera* and sees it mixed, it will come to the table as flat of flavour as in the days of the





SEÑORA BURGESS AND TAME JAVELINA,  
HACIENDA JOTÉ.



TORTILLA MAKING, HACIENDA JOTÉ.  
(*This tortilla-stone is said to be more than 100 years old.*)



*conquistadores*. Why the native, who adds salt to other foods with apparent relish, insists upon having his *tortilla* unsalted, is a mystery to white men. The cook says, "But, señor, our fathers used no salt," and the matter is settled. Except for its unsalted flavour, the *tortilla* is not at all unpalatable; Norm preferred them to any other form of native bread. When cold they will keep indefinitely, but—I would rather avoid them if more than a day old, in the interest of my dentistry.

We tramped on and on, slapping at the clouds of mosquitoes and black flies that swarmed about us. It was impossible for me to tell the colour of Norm's khaki shirt because of the mosquitoes stealing a lift upon his back and shoulders. Sundown came and still Playa Grande was not in sight. We limped on through the twilight and so came to a well where a man and boy were filling a cattle-trough made from a great hollow log. We sat down beside the well and watched them for a time. A scrubby little pony was hitched to one end of the well-rope, and when he walked away, driven by the boy, the bucket was drawn to the surface, where the man dumped it into the trough.

The boy told us that we must turn aside from this trail and follow a narrow path leading into the deep jungle, now a purple-and-grey mystery in the evening haze. This path, the boy said (for the man refused to speak at all), led to Playa Grande. So we turned into the scrub timber and in ten minutes it was as if we walked alone upon the earth.

Norm sat down to rebandage his blistered feet, so I gained nearly two hundred yards upon him, stepping carefully in the dusky trail for fear of snakes. The branches met overhead, for the path we followed was barely twenty inches wide. I began to wonder why no

sign of human habitation appeared before us ; then there came a snarl from above and I leaped back instinctively, forgetting the pack upon my shoulders for the first time that afternoon. My gun was out and I fired almost without aiming, flipped back the hammer and fired again, then a third time.

A slim, spotted shape came to the ground not ten feet ahead of where I poised on tip-toe, snarling and clawing up the leaves for an instant, then lay still. For the first time in my life—and in that chill minute, the last time, I hoped—I had met the *tigre*, or *jaguar*, of Central America face to face.

Norm, six-gun in one hand and a boot in the other, came flying up the trail, prepared—if one might judge by his expression and attitude—for anything, preferably the worst. We prodded the carcass with a long stick, to be sure that it was really dead, then examined it more closely. We estimated its weight as a hundred pounds. All three of my shots had struck ; one straight through the skull between the yellow-green eyes, the others through the lungs. The soft-nosed bullet had mushroomed upon the bone and the back-head was torn completely out.

It was too dark to photograph it and both of us were too weary to consider skinning the brute, so we dragged it aside and went on. An hour later, when we had almost given up hope of finding a house and were reconciling ourselves to the prospect of a foodless, waterless, mosquito-tortured night, a calf bleated somewhere in the darkness ahead and we stumbled out into an open space. The low, dark bulk of a large house was before us.

An apathetic *mozo* sprawled in a hammock upon the verandah, apparently oblivious to the whining legions

which swarmed impartially about the flaring carbide torch near-by and upon his leathery hide. He lacked energy to reply to our queries, save for a grunting "*No comprendo Inglés*" ("Don't understand English"), in answer to my best Spanish! We were contemplating third-degree methods to break his silence when from the direction of the corral hastened a tall, thin figure and the welcome sound of English smote upon our ears.

"I 'clare to goodness! Ef dey ain't white gen'l'mens! An' walkin'! Come into de house, suhs. I sure is glad to see some white folks."

So were we made acquainted with Jim Burgess, the British Honduran *administrador*, or foreman, of Hacienda Joté. When our hammocks had been swung for us in a corner of the big house, Jim's wife, who had been directing culinary operations from her hammock, set out huge gourds of cool *chicha*, the fermented juice of pounded maize, pineapples and oranges.

*Comida*, eaten from spotless china, was a civilized meal of beefsteaks, fried potatoes, beans—white, for a marvel—and white bread! When the barefooted serving-girl had cleared the table the Señora Burgess, a comely, grey-haired woman, far superior to the other Nicaraguensas we had seen of late, brought in a short, squat bottle and three glasses. We had learned the brotherhood-of-man doctrine thoroughly by this time, so we drank with Jim and pronounced it excellent whisky.

It was the first liquor we had drunk—bar only the swallow of *guaro* at Guasimal—since setting foot upon the beach at Puntarenas. We wouldn't have broken our vow of abstinence this night save for the crying need for a bracer. Alcohol and the white man mix in the tropics only with regret to the latter, especially if



there is strenuous work to be done. But certainly with the whisky that night came a more rosy outlook upon Nicaragua. The huge blisters upon our weary feet were forgotten, as were heat, mosquitoes and the surliness of the people.

We were dog-tired, for not yet was the time when a thirty- or forty-mile hike was an ordinary day's work for hardened muscles. The gambollings of a tame peccary, the *javelina*, or wild pig, of Central America, roused us at daybreak, in time for a breakfast as ample as had been the dinner of the night before.

Jim had sent a couple of *mozos* the night before to bring in the *tigre*, and we weighed it on his big scales. Ninety-seven pounds, "*ni más ni menos*," the carcass weighed. Jim, who had a dozen skins about the house, and regarded a *tigre* or *león* hunt as part of his duties, merely said that it was as big a *tigre* as he had seen for a year or two. We donated the skin to him, for we couldn't take it with us.

He wouldn't hear of us walking on to Playa Grande. He had seen the blisters on Norm's feet and he informed us that in the *potreros* were horses "just beggin' to be rid!" Two *caballos* were saddled for us, and then with Jim and Amelio, the cattle-foreman, a stocky little man with enormous shock of black hair, a flowing moustache and dog-like black eyes, we set out through a short-cut across the jungle-pastures of Joté, for Playa Grande.

There was little ground for comparison of this Nicaraguan-owned ranch, with its dusty, arid land and scrawny cattle, raised not for beef or butter, but for cheese production, with the fertile acres of Mojica. Everything about it seemed to have gone to seed; its busiest scenes carried an atmosphere of desolation, like that

one notices in a once-busy mining-camp left behind when the vein has petered out. It was not an inspiring ride.

We came in early afternoon to the tide-flats of the Playa Grande, a mile-wide estuary flowing into the Gulf of Fonseca. Here was a single, unpainted wooden building set upon a bit of high ground near the water, with the desolate scrub-jungle walling it about on the other sides.

"*Comandancia*," said Jim briefly and led the way on his tiny, tiger-striped *mula*.

To the *Comandante*, a little man clad in gingham shirt, dungaree trousers and rusty panama hat, with nothing military about him except his mustachios, Jim explained that we desired passage in the weekly gasolina-launch which ran between Tempisque—lying upstream—to La Union. The Commandant asked to see our passports and *permisos de embarque* (embarkation permits) from the *Prefecto* at Chinandega, necessary before anyone could embark in a foreign-bound craft.

We had only passports and so informed the Commandant, whereupon he telephoned the office of the *Prefecto* (the *comandancia*, having once been the property of Zelaya the Dictator, was connected by a single-line telephone with Chinandega, which worked—sometimes) for instructions. Ensued a lengthy conversation concerning the visas on our passports, our acquaintances and business in Nicaragua, and our personal appearance. When the Commandant stated that our passports had not been signed by the American Minister in Managua, he was ordered to send us back to Chinandega for *permisos de embarque*. We refused to go, thereby establishing a deadlock.

At last the Commandant asked if I would speak to

the clerk in the *Prefecto's* office. I took the receiver and asked if the clerk understood English.

"I spike a veree leetle," came the reply. "What you want?"

"We want to go by the weekly *gasolina* to La Union, Salvador. Our passports have been visaed by the Nicaraguan, Honduran and Salvadoran ministers, and we haven't time to chase back to Chinandega for another inspection. Besides, we were in Chinandega day before yesterday and nothing was said about *permisos de embarque*. You have a Government official here, and if he can't inspect our papers and see that they're in proper order, what the blazes *can* he do, besides telephone you?"

A splutter from the other end of the line, and momentary silence.

"Where you are from?" inquired the voice an instant later.

"From San José de Costa Rica."

"You are from by steamer?"

"No, by horse. *Por tierra*. From San José to Chinandega by land."

"Why you are go to Salvador?"

"On private business. It doesn't concern you."

"Ve-ree well. I am care none. In Chinandega you are know some mans?"

"No, only in Managua."

"Who they are in Managua?"

"Mr. Kingsbury, for one."

"You will please to spell for me hees *nombre* [name]?"

"Sure. Listen [I wrestle with the intricacies of the Spanish alphabet, kicking myself meanwhile for not selecting a shorter "*nombre*," and producing sounds like the computation of a month's laundry-bill by an



GARRISON OUTSIDE COMANDANCIA, CHINANDEGA. STILL BULLET-SCARRED.



POVERTY-STRICKEN CABIN BESIDE TRAIL TO PLAYA GRANDE.





excited Chinaman]: "Kay—ee—en—nai—hai—essay—bay—oo—air—ray—ee—gree—ai—gah."

"I are not understand heem. Do heem again."

Once more I spell it.

"Um-h-m-m! You weel not come to Chinandega?"

"We will not!"

"Veree well. In half one hour you are know what I say."

Possibly three minutes later the telephone jangled. The Commandant listened, then saluted and turned to us with the news that we were graciously permitted by His Highness *Prefecto Tiferino, Comandante Militar, Jefe Politico* and holder of the High Graft, the Middle and the Low for the Department of Chinandega, to embark in the launch for La Union on Monday morning when it came to Playa Grande. But we were warned that the passage-money, seven dollars gold apiece, must be paid into the pilot's hands before embarking.

Jim made arrangements with the *Comandante* to provide our meals during our stay, then said good-bye. We watched the little *mula* pick her way across the treacherous tide-flats and told each other that there was nothing black about him except his skin.

There was no woman at the *comandancia*. One of the three boy-soldiers who, under the Commandant, formed the garrison of the port, served as cook. In the evening he brought us tin plates of rice and black beans and filled our aluminium cups with muddy *café negro* sweetened with brown sugar. The boiled plantains I had eaten at midday lay heavy upon my conscience, and between whirling stomach and the racket of a herd of goats embroiled under the house I got but little sleep.

We were out as the first red rays of dawn flashed upon

the broad, glinting sweep of the Playa Grande. (The word "playa" really means strand, sea-shore or beach, but the Central American, like the folk who christen apartment-houses and pancake-flours in our own land, often pays very little heed to the fitness of the title bestowed upon an object.) From the jungle about the *comandancia* came the matutinal chatter of thousands of parrots and macaws which, like ourselves, were preparing to leave their lodgings.

All the mosquitoes and gnats of the neighbourhood were out enjoying the crisp freshness of the morning, making necessary a smudge at the edge of the *comandancia's* verandah which overlooked the Playa Grande. We sat huddled near the smoke and looked down the glassy estuary toward the Gulf of Fonseca, that historic wet mouth of Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, where the old buccaneers had once maintained a stronghold. The twin peaks on *El Tigre* Island marked the site of Amapala, forty miles away, and the hazy headlands of Salvador, dimly blue in the far distance, joined the blue edge of the sky-bowl to form background for the picture.

We stared longingly in this direction, "for 'twas there that we would be," and the delay in the *comandancia* pleased us little. The last time we had seen those peaks and headlands it had been from the depths of steamer chairs; as we left Amapala behind we had danced to the music of a Filipino orchestra on the *Para's* broad deck. Now we approached again in khakis and boots.

Breakfast-menu was *comida*-menu all over again—rice, *frijoles* and muddy coffee. When we had eaten our ration the *Comandante* proposed an excursion downstream to a fishers' camp, and we embarked in a long

dugout canoe with the *Comandante* and the *administrador* of a neighbouring hacienda, with two soldiers to row us down-river.

The camp of the fishermen was set in a tiny, machete-hacked clearing in the jungle almost at the water's edge. It was an "open-faced" shelter of boughs, with hides of deer, of hefty alligators and *tigres* thrown carelessly over the roof, or hung from near-by trees beside the rude nets and great, soft-iron shark-hooks. The fishermen numbered a half-dozen, wild, tangled-haired and bushy-bearded, half-naked, who were more gentle toward strangers than their uncouth appearance promised.

The *administrador*, like the *Comandante*, was well known to them; he fell straightway to bargaining for some of the dried, salted fish hanging from the racks near the camp. The purchase completed, he looked about for other form of amusement and found Norm cleaning his six-gun, which he had taken from the shoulder-holster beneath his shirt. The *administrador* wore a nickel-plated, pearl-handled sidearm, of the type sold by enterprising American munitions factories to the Latin trade—eight inches of barrel-length, almost equally dangerous at either end. He was inordinately proud of this bright ornament, and to me—Norm's Spanish was confined to a dozen or so of nouns—explained the superior beauty of his weapon. He levelled it at a huge tree some fifty feet away and put three shots into the trunk only a couple of feet from the blaze which was his target.

Norm looked up absently, then, holding his blue Smith and Wesson at the hip, sent six shots into the blaze, over which I could place my palm. Judging from the awed expressions of the watchers, Norm still holds the championship of Northern Nicaragua; after that,

the *Comandante* treated him with a respect wonderful to behold, and the *administrador* was markedly silent. The palm-wide cluster of holes was significant.

At midday the fishermen prepared a meal of salt fish, jerked vension and rice and beans, and spread *tigre*-skins for us in a shady spot. When we had eaten, the entire company sprawled under the trees for a *siesta*—which was not so different from the custom in small towns of the United States, after the Sunday dinner. In the cool of the evening we rowed back, hugging the green wall of low trees half-submerged by the high tide, with the *Comandante* watching keenly, a long-barrelled Mauser of very ancient vintage across his knees, for a deer. Once we halted and, peering through the branches, caught sight of one of the little dun bucks of the country. But the reloaded shell in the rifle wouldn't explode, and at the click of hammer on cap the buck was gone in great bounds.

With the little soldiers singing at the oars, we drew up to the landing-plank on the muddy beach below the *comandancia*, just as the darkness came down in earnest. When the *administrador* and his cowboys had ridden away through the night, their *alforjas* bulging with dried fish and all apparently well satisfied with their outing, we were given our *comida* of rice, *frijoles* and jerked venison.

After a period of noticeable hesitation the *Comandante* produced from a locked drawer in his table a half-dozen little iced cakes—evidently his private luxury—and we listened for an hour to his discussion of that subject of engrossing interest to every Costaricense and Nicaraguense—the Nicaraguan Canal, which must eventually replace the makeshift passage at Panama. At nine-thirty Norm rose and stretched.



"We'd better be turning in," he suggested. "That *gasolina* may be here pretty early to-morrow."

So, in the optimism bred of ignorance of the movements of vessels in those waters, we swung our hammocks between the verandah-posts and covered them with the mosquito-bars, planning to be up with the dawn, ready for our sixty-mile journey across Fonseca. But when the morrow came . . .

Either the goat-herd was less noisy, or we were sleepier, for we were like dead men until sunrise. As the sky above the jungle-trees was turning from grey to crimson and the parrot army discussed the day's doing behind us, we were bathing in the salt, lukewarm waters of the estuary. But for the sight of an ominous dorsal fin in midchannel and the memory of the ten-foot 'gator-hides hanging in the fishing-camp, we would have plunged in for a swim.

After breakfast the telephone rang and the *Comandante* notified us, very apologetically, that the launch *Delia* had broken down and so couldn't arrive before "*mañana*" ("the morrow"). We resigned ourselves to the inevitable and went up to the well in the jungle, a hundred yards from the *comandancia*, where, despite a plague of black flies and tiny, pugnacious wasps, we managed to shave and scrub our spare clothing.

When we returned to the house we found the *Comandante* engaged in the second of his three daily occupations, which were, in order, driving the herd of red goats from the verandah of the house, feeding two half-fledged parrots which nested in an old hat, and fishing diligently, but always unsuccessfully, from the dugout canoe.

Once a week he assumed his official expression and inspected the passenger-list of the *gasolina* bound from Tempisque to La Union. Since this craft was owned



by Tiferino the Prefect, the *Comandante's* superior officer and patron, the inspection was never more than perfunctory. For his duties the *Comandante* received the sum of thirty dollars per month. So princely was this sum and so pleasant the duty that in Managua there were always a horde of applicants for the post. One other source of revenue the *Comandante* had :

The three little soldiers received thirty-two cents per day for their services during a six-month enlistment. Of this amount they were required to hand over half to the *Comandante* for their ration. He fed them on rice and beans at an average cost of six centavos per day and so pocketed a profit of thirty cents per day, since there were three soldiers in the garrison. This amount, added to his regular salary, made nearly forty dollars a month, heavy pay for a Nicaraguan officer.

The soldiers knew all this, but, like most natives, it seemed to arouse in them no indignation. They were products of the Central American system of politics ; government was the machine for rewarding top-dog. But they were at least consistent in their outlook. If they had the chance, they would graft, also ; so why blame another for doing no more than they, in like position, would have done ?

Like the majority of his compatriots, the *Comandante* would desert any or all of his important duties to be photographed. As a matter of fact, he was willing to pose every hour or so, and the garrison—well, they would have walked upon their hands from daylight to sundown, had Norm but pointed the kodak in their direction.

Those weary, weary days at Playa Grande ! Each morning we rose, prepared to board that seemingly mythical *gasolina*. Each evening saw us still there,



PHOTOGRAPHER AND MICA-SNAKE KILLED IN WELL, PLAYA GRANDE.



COMANDANTE AND GARRISON, PLAYA GRANDE.



with the *Comandante's* placating assurance that the launch must come "of a certainty, señores!" on the morrow.

We were up with the dawn, to sit in the shelter of a smudge until breakfast; done with the inevitable rice and black beans, we watched apathetically while the *Comandante* and one of the soldiers fished from the dug-out. There was nothing to read, very little to eat, nowhere at all to go. In the afternoon we waited for the evening meal and at dusk we swung our hammocks. After that first windfall of venison we returned to a steady ration of *arroz y frijoles negros*—rice and black beans—until we could view with perfect equanimity a clime where neither vegetable might grow.

The *Comandante* appeared nightly upon the verandah to recite his English lesson. From some old grammar he had pilfered a single phrase, and this he parroted, watching us keenly to note the effect.

"Geeve—eet—to—me-e-e—un—keess!" he would say, then, very anxiously, in Spanish:

"It is correct, *mi pronunciación*?"

One of the little soldiers, a fifteen-year-old Honduran waif from Amapala, had picked up a sizeable collection of most lurid oaths, which he recited in a queer, twisted sing-song with no apparent knowledge of the meaning of the individual words, but with a wicked understanding of their nature. When I asked him the source of his education he replied naïvely: "From a missionary-man, señor."

Sunrises and sunsets were our only compensations. Each morning we turned, Mohammedan-like, to the east. There the estuary lay in smooth, gleaming curves between its walls of low, damp-green jungle; far across the tree-tops the faintest lovely rose-flush marked the

line between sky and water ; to the south the truncated cone of El Viejo was limned in regal purple against the delicate lavender of the heavens. For a moment or two it was so, as if all Nature had come for a breath to a stand-still ; then with a magnificent rush the flaming edge of the sun shot above the horizon, and the colours of the sky deepened and paled and changed in a welter of writhing hues that embraced the spectrum, merging at the last in a solid sheet of orange that spread all across the canopy. The brazen day had come again.

Our cigarettes vanished with the third day of bondage, for there was little to do but smoke. The *Comandante* had no tobacco, so for two days and nights we went about in tobacco-less gloom. Then Norm found two long stubs—we forbore to ask which one's they had been—and these we rolled in cigarette papers and smoked very slowly, so that they lasted for an entire day.

As we waited for breakfast on the fourth morning a blotch appeared on the water upstream, and Santiago, the Honduran youth, cast a careless glance toward it.

“ ‘Meester Sharlee,’ ” he lisped. “ *El un Alemán* ” (“ He is a German ”).

Half an hour later an ancient dugout canoe came along the landing-plank and a tall, thin white man, clad in old felt hat, ragged pyjamas and sandals of untanned cowhide, laid down the bow paddle. A native woman, as tattered as her lord and master, rose in the stern, while we remained in the shelter of the verandah, having small love for Germans. But the craving for tobacco soon outweighed race-dislike. The man was puffing serenely at a *cigarro*, so down we went to the landing and examined the cargo of the dugout.

“ Glory be ! ” said Norm. “ Look at the *cigarros* ! ”



"Do you speak English?" I inquired of the owner of the dugout, and he looked at the two of us with a quizzical expression in deep-set grey eyes.

"Well," he drawled, "if the lingo we used to use in Rhode Island hasn't been ruled out of the dictionary, I may claim that I do."

Thus did Charley Scott enter our circle of acquaintances. He had been more than thirty years in the Five Republics, and as we sat on the verandah, wreathed about by smoke of *puro*, he told us of shooting *jaguars* and *leones* in the jungles along the Playa Grande; of his life in Central America before a severe fever had stripped him of everything he owned save the old canoe and an ancient Remington carbine whose stock perpetually threatened to divorce the barrel.

One of the Lost Tribe was Charley. He had come to the tropics resolved to make a stake and return to his native town, but gradually, as the years passed and lined his pockets with no more than fair wages, his connexion with his people had been broken. Now he knew that he would live and die in lotus-land. He shrugged somewhat indifferently as he finished his tale, or, rather, the portions of it he told us.

"I'll get caught by fever some day, or a *tigre* will drop on me in the jungle," he said fatalistically. "Then 'Meester Sharlee' will be forgotten by everybody."

We donated two new flannel shirts and two pairs of trousers to his outfit and he returned the compliment with a small bundle of *puros*, the finger-thick, rough-rolled cigars of the *pais*. For those *puros*—in that moment—we would have stripped and gone into Salvador in pink G-strings, so we couldn't feel that the charity was from us to him.

"*Mañana*" the launch must surely come, came the word over the telephone from Chinandega, so we gave over a hastily conceived plan to have Charley set us across to the Salvadoran shore above La Union, and watched him paddle downstream in the darkness.

The eighth day of our imprisonment dawned grey and cool. After a frugal breakfast of *frijoles*—the rice had given out the day before—we packed our belongings for the sixth time since arrival. I inquired of the *Comandante*, "*Cuanto le debo a Usted?*" ("How much do we owe you?")

The reply came so glibly that immediately we saw the point of all his shrewd questions as to our wealth and worldly position in the States. He had been determining the exact amount at which we might be expected to balk.

"*Siete cordobas y setenta-cinco centavos*" ("Seven dollars and seventy-five cents"), he answered in honeyed tones.

Now, we had but five dollars and ninety cents in the cordoba currency of Nicaragua and were of no mind to exchange *bona-fide* United States banknotes for more of this "just-as-good-except-usually" money. So I rejoined in accents of pleased surprise:

"*Setenta-cinco centavos, solo?*" ("Only seventy-five cents?")

He admitted his tactical error by reducing the demand to a mere murmur—plainly audible, however—of "*Cinco pesos*" ("Five dollars").

Recognizing the futility of further argument, we delved into our pockets and produced our combined hoards of Nicaraguan small-denomination bills and silver, and counted out five cordobas. The ninety centavos remaining in our possession worried the

*Comandante*. He was pained at thought of us leaving his sphere of influence with money of the republic ; for nearly an hour he dropped broad hints that Nicaraguan money was looked upon with contempt in Salvador ; it would be of no earthly use to use once aboard the *gasolina*. I fear that it would pain him deeply did he know that, as I write these words, those miniature banknotes lie on the desk before me.

We sat upon the verandah, straining our eyes for the first glimpse of the *gasolina* of deliverance ; I think that the Israelites waited no more anxiously for the coming of Moses than we looked for the arrival of that launch. Then the telephone bells jangled and the *Comandante* edged nervously through the doorway to say that it was impossible, owing to an unforeseen delay, for the launch to leave Tempisque until “ *mañana*,” when, of a certainty, it must arrive.

By this time we were past fear, fawning, or even discretion. We paced the verandah and expressed, in mixed Spanish and English, our full and unqualified opinion of Nicaragua in general and Tiferino the Prefect in particular, until the jungle-walls threw back the echoes.

The *Comandante*, at first mention of the *Prefecto*’s august name, dodged back into the house where he couldn’t be said to have heard. But Santiago listened rapturously and seemed disappointed when we paused for lack of breath. But the *Comandante* didn’t reappear until the storm was over.

We ate and swung our hammocks that evening in silence, determined that it was the last nightfall we should witness from the *comandancia*. If the *gasolina* failed to appear by noon of the morrow, then we would induce the *Comandante*—at the point of a gun, if neces-

sary—to set us down to Charley Scott's camp, then hire the latter to set us across Fonseca.

So we turned in, but not to sleep, for we had been all day in somewhat the same condition as that of the luckless *hombre* of whom the old Spanish ballad tells :

“ *No tengo tabaco ; no tengo papel ;  
No tengo dinero ; no tengo mujer !* ”

(“ I have no tobacco ; I have no (cigarette) papers ;  
I have no money ; I have no woman ! ”)

The *puros* given us by Charley had been smoked to the last lip-scorching stump by midnight of the previous day—six of them disappeared while we were outside the house, and Santiago looked most guilty as we searched for them—and our nerves were taut. Also, the goats insisted upon staging a pitched battle under the verandah for comfortable spots, and we drove them into the jungle only to hear them return, panic-stricken.

For from half a dozen points in the jungle, both behind the *comandancia* and across the wide, moonlit waters of the estuary, came long, hair-raising howls. The cur sleeping beneath the hammocks rose with neck-hair bristling and with a whimper of fright tried to crawl into the hammock with Norm. Santiago appeared in the doorway of the house, dragging one of the long-barrelled, ancient Mauser rifles issued to Nicaraguan troops.

“ *Coyotes solos !* ” (“ Lone wolves ! ”) he said uneasily, and went on to explain that these were great, grey ghost-beasts which hunted singly and often attacked the inhabitants of isolated cabins in the jungle and devoured them. Much of what he told us he had heard from parents and grandparents, so I should imagine



THE CHURCH, MASAYA.





that the *coyote solo* is regarded with much the same awe by Central Americans as that which was once felt by the French peasants for the *loup-garou*, or were-wolf. Santiago finally went back to his bed upon the table inside, but he carried the long rifle across his arm, and when I looked inside the house next morning he slept with face cuddled upon the barrel, one bare toe in dangerous promixity to the trigger.

The lagging dawn-light came at last to redden the clouds above the trees, then the sun broke through the mist, blood-red and gold. We went down to the water to wash, then took our usual seats in the smoke of the smudge, tortured by the ghosts of vanished cigarettes.

At eight o'clock—I think we shall never forget the hour, even if we live to compute our years with an adding-machine—the 'phone-bell tinkled and the *Comandante* leaped out, all smiles, to tell us that the *gasolina* had left Tempisque, was even then headed downstream to pick us up. I have read my *Robinson Crusoe* and *Swiss Family Robinson* faithfully since childhood, but not until that moment had I ever really understood the emotions of the castaway when a ship heaves in sight.

## CHAPTER VII

### SALVADORAN PLAINS

ACROSS FONSECA IN A SIEVE—LA UNION AND QUARANTINE—PROS AND CONS OF LA UNION—NOTES ON CENTRAL AMERICAN TRADING—ZACATECOLUCA THE UNPRONOUNCEABLE—IN AND ABOUT SAN SALVADOR—MORE PASSPORTS—"FIESTA" MEANS "NOISE"—AT THE MERCY OF "EL BARBERO"—"PRETTIEST TOWN IN CENTRAL AMERICA."

TEN o'clock saw us in mid-stream, with the dingy *comandancia* of Playa Grande fading in the distance astern. We looked back and waved at the *Comandante* and the little soldiers who stood upon the rough landing-stage waving their ragged hats, then turned our faces toward the Gulf.

As Al. Jolson might put it, "there are boats and then there are—boats!" Our craft was of the latter variety. It was the most dilapidated, decrepit old ballahou I have ever been a passenger on, some twenty feet over all, with a ragged, dirty canopy pretending to house in the interior, and propelled by an ancient, one-lunged gas engine—the manufacturers' number one, we decided after examination—secured to its bed by one bolt, a twisted iron nail, two hairpins and the engineer's "arrival in port" socks.

The engineer was prone to slumber. It must have been an inherited talent; by no possible strain of the imagination could one conceive of such ability—genius, almost—for sleeping in any position being acquired by a man of his years through mere practice. There was an

impromptu quality about his slumberings which was delightful ; it set him apart from other sleepers even in that land of drowsing folk.

We were filled with enthusiasm when we set forth ; touched with the spirit of the Argonauts as the launch cleared the mouth of the estuary and we, looking across the Gulf, saw *El Tigre* Island dead-ahead. But the *piloto* turned inshore to a hacienda he knew, a tiny spot of forty-odd thousand acres. Here we stayed until midnight, drowsing in the shade of the verandah, for the pilot was unfamiliar with the currents and refused to move until *pleamar*—high tide.

There were four passengers beside ourselves in the launch : two Salvadoran brothers, a *mujer* of easy virtue accompanying the elder, and an olive-skinned, intelligent-faced individual in khaki more travel-stained than our own, whose baggage consisted of a leather satchel with a small tin bucket dangling outside and an immense, oiled canvas bag filled with lurid pictures of saints and madonnas. This *hombre* was a Spanish globetrotter from Madrid, bound on an attempt to circle the globe in five years, supporting himself by the sale of his glaring lithographs of Catholic art. His Castilian accent was very different from the slurring patois of Central American countries, and it was a subject of almost tearful indignation to him that these “Indios,” as he called them contemptuously, mocked his accent.

“I—I speak the pure Castilian,” he cried, “and these savages dare to laugh !”

The little tin bucket in which he carefully boiled all water before drinking it was another source of merriment to the people. The Salvadorans made many atrocious jokes about it.

During the night as we chugged and stopped, chugged

and stopped again, the *piloto* explained to the engineer—or, rather, in the engineer's general direction, since the latter was slumbering peacefully on the fantail outside the canopy—how *Prefecto* Tiferino had kept us cooling our heels at Playa Grande day after day, to the amusement of Chinandegan officialdom, by the promise that the launch would surely come on the morrow. The *piloto* had taken our ignorance of the language for granted, because we had not spoken to him since embarking. He was smitten utterly dumb when I asked him in his own tongue how the *Prefecto* spelled his name.

We limped onward through the darkness, with Miengara Island, the ancient stronghold of the buccaners, bulking dimly over the bow. The woman and I, with the exception of the pilot, were the only ones awake. Norm had pre-empted the starboard thwart, upon which he slept peacefully; the globetrotter sprawled at full-length on the greasy bottom-boards—disturbed periodically by the boy who bailed the craft, ten gallons every half-hour!—while the engineer, heedless of his sputtering charge, snored raucously outside the canopy. One of the Salvadorans, the younger, had fallen asleep in a sitting posture, while the other lay with his head pillowed in the woman's lap, hand on the hilt of a long-bladed dagger at his belt. He roused himself from time to time to cast a suspicious glance first up into the woman's face, then at me, to catch any signs of intelligence between us.

Merely to provoke the surly Salvadoran, I began to chat with the woman, and she, joining in the game with a wink, leaned interestedly forward to reply. So the man was forced to sit up and try to keep awake to prevent her paying undue attention to me.

So the night wore on, with the three of us puffing at



our *puros*, of which all of us had bought a fresh supply at the hacienda. The pilot, recovering from the shock of discovering that I spoke Spanish—of a sort—turned to inquire if Norm and I had one hundred dollars each. Since it is usually profitable, in Central America, to seem poor, I shouldn't have admitted possession of this amount even if we had had it. As a matter of record, neither of us had carried so much as fifty dollars since leaving Costa Rica, for we made it a point to belt only enough cash to provide for ordinary living expenses.

"Then," said the pilot triumphantly, when I had grunted in the negative, "you can't enter Salvador. All Europeans and Americans—except Central Americans—must have one hundred dollars each, in gold money, or they are turned back. You will have to go back to Tempisque with me in this launch and you must pay your return passage, also. It is the law."

I smiled as irritatingly as I knew how and said nothing. From time to time he turned to assure me that our impoverished condition made us ineligible for entry into the Republic of Salvador, but I was too busily engaged in formulating plans to answer him.

At daybreak we passed the long pier of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company in the harbour of La Union and stood up to the Customs Wharf. The pilot, with utter indifference to the presence of the woman, turned over the wheel to the boy and stripped himself of the greasy clothes he had worn on the passage. When he had completed his toilet he was clad in grey flannel trousers evidently tailored for a much larger man, one of the mercerized cotton shirts which give a semblance of silk and patterned with those stripes best calculated to attract the beholder's unwavering attention. A cravat of magenta, with white horseshoes, and a dingy panama

completed his outfit. We went along the Customs Wharf without further delay.

We climbed a rickety stairway at imminent risk of a ducking and answered to our names as they were called from the passenger-list handed over by the pilot. The latter, offended by my failure to give proper heed to his information concerning the statutes of Salvador, waited anxiously for the moment when we would be driven back down the stairway into the launch. He even took the *Comandante* of the Port Guard aside and explained our financial embarrassment to that official. But another complication had become apparent and we had occasion to damn the *Prefecto* once more and very much indeed.

Sanitary certificates, signed by the *Médico Cívico* of Chinandega and attesting our physical purity, were demanded of us. We did not have them, nor did the pilot, as our conductor, have them for us. The Port Doctor—we had enjoyed a tilt with him when the *Para* touched at La Union, and knew his devotion to the letter of his office—was sent for post-haste and he came, though not post-haste.

He informed us with every indication of extreme boredom that we must be quarantined for a period of five days. We waited on the dock for a few minutes, under the guard of a dozen boys of twelve or thirteen in blue denim uniforms with red stripes along the seams of their trousers-legs. These militant youngsters kept the muzzles of their short Mausers trained with uncomfortable directness upon us and seemed disappointed that they received no order to fire.

The Spanish globetrotter was in like predicament to ours, but he had a heritage of patience far superior. He sat down upon his big canvas bag, apparently

resigned—as we were not—to remain in one position for the entire five days. Finally he asked the doctor if he might go uptown for coffee. The doctor nodded consent, and the engineer of the *gasolina*, now almost awake under the excitement of landing, and wearing shoes, told us that we, also, might as well go to the hotel.

The globetrotter had spread out his possessions upon the dock for inspection by the officials, but they seemed so weary, so *ennuied* by La Unionistic existence, that we had not the heart to add further to their burdens. We picked up our hammock-wrapped bundle and without troubling them to look it over followed behind the engineer toward the town.

He led us to the Hôtel Italiano, where, knowing Central American officialdom fairly well, we engaged a large, clean room. Coffee, with eggs and wheat bread, was served us in the patio and we ate like—two able-bodied men who had subsisted for ten days on a scant dole of boiled rice and *frijoles*.

There was no American consul at La Union, but in the presence of Mr. Westin, consul for Panama, a big, bluff Englishman long resident in the republics, we failed to mourn the lack of a representative of our own land. We spent the morning in his patio, listening to tales of buried treasure and of robbers' and pirates' strongholds on Miengara and the neighbouring isles and in looking over his array of pearls.

If ever I accumulate sufficient of this world's goods to be able to enjoy a hearty attack of nervous prostration, I shall hie me to a steamer office and purchase a ticket for La Union, there to swing in a hammock in Mr. Westin's shady patio and listen to his talk of life beneath the banana-flag, as he has seen it for twenty years.

On our way back to the Italiano we stopped for an

hour at the queerest institution in La Union. This is the English school of Walter Vaughn, a Jamaican negro of Panaman citizenship. Vaughn had files of Salvadoran boys—and one little Turk—ranging from five to fourteen years of age, reciting English sentences and returning answers to the questions of the instructor in clipped, singsong English.

Vaughn is doing a real missionary work in La Union, and it is a pity that some of our philanthropists—those who insist upon sending their money overseas, at any rate—cannot endow a school of languages in the Central American Republics. Much of the distrust of the Latin American for the Anglo-Saxon disappears with knowledge of English, and if Vaughn, possessed of practically no equipment save a half-dozen tattered grammars, can give parents and children a working-knowledge of the tongue in brief time, modern methods must of a certainty work wonders.

There was a natural-history exhibit in the schoolroom—jars of snakes and insects preserved in alcohol and drawings of various animals. We saw our ancient acquaintance, the *toboba*, and several other serpents, the habits of which Vaughn gave us in a peculiar mixture of sooth and fable. One powerful constrictor of much the same shape as the moccasin of the Southern United States, of a rusty brown colour, he called a *massacuata*.

This snake, said Vaughn, was harmless to man, except : The *massacuata* is fond of curling himself about the rafters of native huts, where the warm air from the cooking-fires rises about him. He keeps to himself, annoying no one. But if the woman of the house is nursing a child, the *massacuata* will descend at night and, thrusting aside the baby, attach himself to the mother's breast.



So, in Salvador, where this belief is universal, there is a saying among the peasants when a scrawny child is seen : “ His mother must have suckled a *massacuata*.”

There was little of interest in La Union. Of its three thousand accredited inhabitants most were indoors whenever we took the air. Of all the towns of Salvador, it is the drowsiest. The steamers touching here, with resultant periodical influx of sightseers, have brought to the place a celluloid semblance of modernness, noticeable principally in the tourist-prices on every item in the shops, and in the tariffs of the hotels and bars.

In the shop of a naturalized German—who tries to be very *simpático* with the natives and has even taken a dusky daughter of the land into his household as its mistress—we found a variety of American and European articles and their prices were only five or six hundred per cent. higher than in the States. The most appealing display in the shop—to natives—was a rack of hideous picture-postcards of the best oily German school—“ Enjoying Life in this Place,” or “ Thought I’d Drop You a Line,” with appropriate simpering morons of both sexes depicted above the captions.

The German had quite a stock of English words ; and by the last steamer he had been given the latest in American slang. So, when we had looked at his German-made panama hats, and other “ curios ” without purchasing, he indicated the postcards.

“ Now dot,” said he, “ is somedings like, vot ? Chess ! Id’s *glassy* ! ” (classy ?).

He had alligator-hides, poorly tanned and dyed in brilliant electric blues and screaming scarlets, modestly priced at from forty to fifty pesos—equivalent to half that many dollars—and of the really beautiful tortoise-



shell ornaments made by the inland natives he had none at all. They weren't lurid enough to be "glassy."

The heat of the sea-coast was intense. Not even in the desolate jungles of Northern Nicaragua had we felt the sultriness so keenly. It was torture to stand at the railway station and look down the gleaming lines of track that ran the mile to the Pacific Mail dock on the shore. We elbowed through the languidly importunate throng of women who wished to sell us newly caught green parrots and big, rowdy-voiced macaws, and searched out a comparatively cool spot in the back room of a *cantina*. Here, fortified somewhat by iced *limonadas* against the blazing furnace that is La Union, we lounged through the afternoon.

At some time that afternoon the Port Doctor became convinced that we had brought with us no contagious diseases from Nicaragua and the quarantine was lifted. We were grateful to Mr. Westin, who had worked the change in the heart of the doctor.

Vaughn came up in the evening to talk of his work, the teaching of English. He mentioned the cold shoulder the Salvadoran Government had shown him when he tried to get official sanction of his efforts. They didn't care, apparently, whether the youth of Salvador ever learned the English tongue. This was Vaughn's impression, and from personal observation I can easily accept it.

We of the United States are for ever prating of our desire for Central American trade, harping on the close friendship existing between the republics of Central America and the big mother-republic to the north. Which is chiefly conversation.

The Central American does *not* like us, as a people. He is far more apt to display friendship for the German,

the Italian, or almost any other foreigner than toward Americans and Britons. He respects the latter, sometimes fears them, seldom understands them and would prefer, all things being considered, to remain at a distance if possible.

Some of this rises, I think, in the fact that the Anglo-Saxon is more difficult of assimilation into a foreign life than any other race. Germans, Italians and French, particularly, become almost the same as natives, *simpático*, at least, while the American or Briton insists upon creating around him a bit of his own homeland, and this the native secretly or openly resents. There is always a feeling of inferiority in the natives' minds when associating with the Anglo-Saxon, while with the men of some other nations, particularly of those I have mentioned, he is on an equality. Which explains the peculiar position of the American or Englishman in the Latin countries of America.

If the merchants of the United States want the trade of Central America they will have to *compete* with other foreign traders. Certainly they will have to make a more intelligent survey of the field than do most of them at present. Many American firms seem to find difficulty in reconciling their ideas of good business methods with those in vogue—for sufficient reasons—in Central American countries.

For instance, at the beginning of the rainy season—May or June—the Central American jobber orders his goods from the States. It requires from two to three months for the shipment to be received by him, but if he gets it within four months, by September, or early October, he is satisfied. But if they are later than October in arriving, he is seriously inconvenienced, for in late October he must begin to ship his goods—by

mule-train or ox-cart in most of the countries—to the retailers inland. All the transportation *must* be accomplished during the dry season when the trails are passable ; in the wet months the roads are quagmires.

These points must be considered by the wholesale dealer in the States, for if they are not, the wholesaler will find himself supplanted by a German or other foreign firm willing to study the peculiar needs of the trade.

Another habit of many American dealers which arouses the ire of the native jobber is the mailing of catalogues—evidently by the hand of a typical office-boy—with insufficient postage affixed. These catalogues come by roundabout ways—one I saw was addressed to a merchant in San José, Costa Rica, Philippine Islands!—to the jobber, sometimes with from twenty-five to fifty cents postage due. And they are printed in English, very often.

Say that the jobber bears this, even, and orders his goods from the offending catalogue at prices listed therein. Then, sometimes months later, he receives a curt statement informing him that the prices have been raised since the catalogue was printed or sent. He agrees, understanding that the market fluctuates, and still waits for his order to be filled. Then, at a time when he should be receiving his goods, he is further notified that all or part of the goods he ordered have been withdrawn from stock. Naturally, he resents such cavalier treatment.

Of course, the instances cited are the extremes ; many firms pay particular attention to their export trade and reap a rich harvest. But from the correspondence I have examined, the complaints I have heard, it would seem that a majority of American



MULE-CAR, SAN SALVADOR.



YOUNGER GENERATION, ZACATECOLUCA.





wholesalers regard the Central American business as a necessary evil, rather than as a golden opportunity.

It seemed that we had no more than stretched upon the heavenly-soft beds when the chambermaid—an elderly Salvadoran with impressive mustachios—set up a pounding at our door. When we rose we found that the clamour had also roused a beggarman crouching upon our doorstep. We gulped our coffee, ate a roll and paid our score. With the beggar preceding us with the bundle of our possessions, we walked through the quiet streets of the sleeping city. The first rays of the sun were just reddening the glassy water of the harbour as we stood before the ticket-window of the station demanding *tiquetes* to Zacatecoluca.

When I had secured the long strips of pasteboard entitling us to a passage on the *Ferrocarril Internacional de Central America en Salvador*, to give the brief, narrow-gauge road its top-heavy official title, I turned to find Norm engaged in deaf-and-dumb conversation with a heavy-eyed policeman. For Salvador has adopted the Continental system of registering the stranger within her gates. One must give name, occupation and destination to the police when entering or leaving any town. Norm had scrawled our names and occupations in the policeman's notebook, but when our destination was also demanded he met his Waterloo among the syllabic jungles of "Zacatecoluca."

We found a seat in the first-class coach and stowed the bundle overhead. The railways of Central America were beginning to seem old acquaintances of ours; we treated them with half-contemptuous familiarity and in this instance proceeded to make ourselves comfortable in approved Latin-American fashion. There were but few passengers, so we turned the seat ahead to face

us and rested our boots upon the wicker cushion, then, placidly ignoring the toothless sign which warned us, "*No se fumar permite en este coche!*" ("Smoking not permitted in this coach!") produced and lighted cigarettes.

As far as San Miguel the country was a level, sea-board plain. That town was the usual Central American pueblo of nine or ten thousand people, with the spires of the churches overshadowing the sprawling collection of low, red-tiled roofs in much the same fashion as the Church overshadows the lives of the dwellers in the houses. The land was very dusty and covered with scrubby thorn-bushes; the little fields seemed dry and not overfertile, the soil burned cinder-hard by the fierce sunlight.

Past San Miguel, the town, the track skirted the foot of San Miguel, the volcano, a blunt, cone-shaped peak with long, gently sloping sides upon which were the green checks marking the slanting fields of the petty farmers. The crater of the volcano was blackened like a sooty chimney and the track was laid across lava-beds for several miles, where the tortured rock had writhed and twisted in all manner of fantastic forms, to cover thousands of acres of lowland with an inky carpet. Then more dusty plain, more scrub timber.

Noon came, and at every jerking, grinding halt—and they were legion, tiny clusters of thatched huts beside the track—the vendors of food and tobacco filed through the train. For a *peso*, worth fifty cents gold, we bought fried chicken, a mound of smoking-hot rice soaked with *chili*-sauce, and two loaf-like rolls. These, with four oranges at a half-centavo each, made an ample midday meal.

As we neared our destination the train gradually

filled with passengers. Since almost every traveller occupied the space intended for four, many of the late-comers were forced to squat in the aisles. The Central American, when travelling by rail, seats himself in one seat, turns the one ahead so that he can place his feet upon it. Then he scatters his belongings over the vacant spaces on both cushions, lights a cigarette and defies God, the Devil, Man or the Railway Company to budge him until his destination is reached.

At every station the police had taken our names, occupations and destinations. When we entered an automobile-stage in Zacatecoluca, holding tickets good for the fifty-nine kilometre passage to San Salvador, we were forced to register once more in the official note-book.

The highway to the capital was a bed of fine, white dust, more than a foot thick, masking countless "chuck-holes," as we call them in the South-west United States. Progress was necessarily slow and rather disagreeable.

On the high road we met women with nets upon their backs containing a single great earthen jar—Salvador, from prehistoric to present days, has produced excellent pottery—and bound for the market at Zacatecoluca. There were many Salvadorans of the better class, astride tough little mules, singlefooting sedately townward, and the ever-present groups of the *peon*-class, with packs upon their shoulders. Whole families—father, mother and from one to ten children—squatted beside the road, resting and passing from hand to hand the great water-gourds. All were coated with fine dust, which clung to hair and skin and gave them the appearance of having just escaped from confinement in a flour-mill.

The automobile is not yet the national institution it has become in our country. All the passengers on the highway gave the stage a wide berth—save only the oxen.

Far ahead of us would appear a pillar of dust thirty or forty feet in height, covering the entire width of the *camino*. Nearing it, at the sound of our driver's siren, a great scurrying of invisible men and animals would ensue. Once the car had plunged into the thick dust we immediately lost sight of each other in the blinding, choking cloud. Almost in our ears would sound the shrill yells of the drovers and a path would clear before the car or, perhaps, a long, sharp horn would graze the side of the car.

But it was most ludicrous when we overtook a herd of pigs. Frantic sows and piglets would dash in every direction, followed by the men, the boys, the dogs, each striving diligently to outdo the others in the matter of uproar. How they could see each other, the automobile, or the animals was a mystery to me, but somehow they managed to bring order out of chaos.

The passing of the daily stage was evidently an event in the lives of the people of the numerous huts along the way, and in the villages we passed every few kilometres. They dashed to their doorways with excited shrieks and watched us out of sight.

At five in the evening we drew out of the sparsely settled region where tiny fields chequered the mountain-sides and the thatched or red-tiled roofs clung to brown shoulders where it seemed that no man could climb. We reached the "paved" highway on the outskirts of the capital and bumped and jolted over the rough stones into the city, as the grey-blue haze settled upon the mountain-tops. The hotels and lodging-houses were filled with the country-folk come in to celebrate the *Fiesta Unionista*, so we considered ourselves fortunate when at a house in the *Avenida Once Norte* we were given a tiny, unlighted room and served *comida*.



San Salvador we found more "citified" than either Managua or San José de Costa Rica. The broad streets are clean and well paved in the main, although some of the *calles* are paved with cobblestones as rough as those of the old quarter of New Orleans. There is electric lighting—in spots. Its fifty-three thousands of inhabitants make it second in size only to Guatemala City among the capitals of Central America, and third in size of all the cities.

The transportation system includes no electric cars. Mule-drawn street-cars like those seen a generation ago in the States jog up and down the streets to the merry tune of the clacking hoofs and the drivers' shrill yells. *Coches* are as common as in San José, and there are a dozen or more expensive automobiles, the property of wealthy planters, to be seen parading solemnly and slowly—remember the cobblestones—about the city.

During our Sunday-morning stroll we passed many stately buildings, notably the *penitenciaria*—very often one of the largest buildings in any Latinized town—the National Theatre, the residences of the president and the governor of the department, and, as usual, many fine Catholic churches. Parks and plazas were on every hand, the lawns of most of them mutilated with statuary of every conceivable size, variety and colour. None but had at least one heroic equestrian figure of a great man of Salvador's past.

Imported goods we found very expensive; a ten-cent sack of Durham tobacco cost me two pesos—equivalent of a dollar, gold. American brands of cigarettes, which had jumped to twenty cents a package just prior to our sailing from San Francisco, were as much as two dollars gold here. Cigarette papers were not to be had at any price, though we visited every shop we saw. The dealers



informed us that "only the factories roll cigarettes in Salvador." But for fifteen centavos could be obtained long, black, quick-burning cigarettes of native make, in packs of twenty. We tried them and found them excellent.

We drifted through the crowded streets toward the market. All the people were in holiday garb and, apparently, holiday spirit, for they chattered and laughed as they went. We had none of the malevolent glances which had marked our passing in the Nicaraguan towns.

Salvador, as a whole, reminded us much of Costa Rica. There was the same apparent content with life-as-it-is in the faces of the *peon*, and, too, the appearance of want so common in Nicaragua was not to be observed among these soft-eyed, brown-skinned people. Everyone seemed to be enjoying a peaceful, pleasant existence, living at a leisurely gait, finding the world a good place. The climate of San Salvador evidently has something to do with the steady activity of its inhabitants; neither hot nor cold, the air is pleasant at any hour of the day. There is a charming lack of the rush and bustle of cities of the States.

In the *Campo del Marte* we lingered for a time with the gaily dressed throng of civilians and brilliantly uniformed army officers, to watch the cadets at field-sports. It was evidently a gala occasion, for the stands were filled with Salvadorans of both sexes in American or European clothing. But we were anxious to be heading northward; cities were not as interesting as the mountain trails. So we turned to the American Ministry and there received the usual greeting—no mail.

In addition to the ordinary commercial passport, Guatemala requires a "local passport" from her Minister



CADETS' FIELD-SPORTS, SAN SALVADOR



MARKET-PLACE, SAN SALVADOR.



in the capital of Salvador, so we inquired our way to the residence of that official. Here, for four pesos each, we were given papers recommending us to the good offices of all Guatemaltecan officials, who were requested to furnish us such comforts as we might need at reasonable prices. The Minister confessed that not for worlds would he penetrate the mountains of his native land, but he had heard something concerning the trails and he told us what little he knew.

At our boarding-house we experienced the usual difficulty when we asked for a second cup of coffee. Not even Oliver Twist's famous request for another helping produced more horror in the spectators. The waiter brought it, but his expression was one of deep injury. It seems odd that Salvador, which produces so much coffee and tobacco, should have so few people addicted to either coffee-drinking or smoking. The women, we observed, smoked more than the men, some of them having a cigar or cigarette between their lips almost constantly. But neither men nor women falling under our notice drank more than one demi-cup of *café* at a meal.

We retired on Sunday night at the *tarde* hour of nine—because at that hour all the lights of the house were turned off—beneath all the covering we could devise. San Salvador's altitude makes for chill nights. The climate seemed much the same as that of San José de Costa Rica, but the town itself, or that indefinable something I can only term "spirit," we found much less to our liking than in "The Queen of Central American Cities."

On Monday morning we were the first persons in the dining-room, for city-dwellers, in Central America as elsewhere, are not early risers. When we had persuaded

the table-mozo to bring us all the coffee our systems demanded, we took a bulky collection of notes, letters and films to the post office. This building, like others we saw in the capital, had once been an imposing structure ; its height and area were still enough to set it apart, but about exterior and interior was an unkemptness that seemed to reflect the careless habits of the native. In caring for their sometimes splendid municipal or federal buildings they lack the regular diligence of the peoples of the north ; once the new plaything has aged a trifle in their eyes, it is apt to be neglected for something of fresher interest.

The only occupant when we arrived was a smiling little policeman who stood behind a rude stand in the entrance, with a tin box of stamps for sale to those who, like ourselves, came before the regular office-hours.

The capital had waked to usher in the *Fiesta Unionista*, a celebration which was in some manner intended to show Salvador's willingness to consider the merging of all Central America into one federation, similar to that existing from 1823 to 1838 under the title of "The United Provinces of Central America," and which has been the theme of various patriots from the time of Francisco Morazan, "the Washington of Central America."

Certainly, on this bright Monday morning, unless the people were stone-deaf they had scant chance to oversleep and miss the excitement. The church bells set up a brazen clamour ; the artillery boomed on the outskirts of the capital, and from *cuartel* and *Campo del Marte* drums and bugles added their quota to the general uproar. The drivers of the mule-cars were in a peculiarly feverish state ; from end to end of their trips they kept the gongs of their little cars vibrating, while the mules



on which the transit system depended became infected with their drivers' enthusiasm and substituted a prancing gallop for the regulation jog-trot.

The ministrations of a Central American barber are so far from being an undiluted joy that I had walked grimly past the *peluquerías* since our arrival in Puntarenas. But my sunburned hair had grown so long that I began to fear actual loss of identity and so turned reluctantly into the striped-front "American Barber Shop" on the narrow street that leads past the *Teatro Nacional*.

Juan Barbero thrust me down into a straight-backed chair and swathed my neck with towels in the orthodox manner, but when he brought out a roll of absorbent cotton I began to wonder just what sanguinary casualties he anticipated. However, he merely tore off a long strip and tucked it between neck and towels. Then, chatting meanwhile with the friends who crowded the doorway to watch an *Americano* on the rack, he emptied the contents of an enormous can of talcum powder upon my head and rubbed it thoroughly into the scalp.

Matters having progressed thus far, he produced a pair of clippers of the size which had always been associated in my mind with livery-stables and proceeded to expose the nakedness of temples and back-head. With a smaller pair of clippers he maintained his reputation for thoroughness, and *then* came the moment for the scissors.

In the midst of a side-splitting anecdote of the Rabelaisian persuasion with which he was regaling the loungers at the door—the psychology of barbers seems much the same the world over—he swooped down upon me with an ominous frown, scissors clutched grimly in

his brown right hand, and seized a handful of top-hair.

This was the moment when he must regain those precious moments lost in preparing me for the ordeal. He slashed away as if snipping for a wager; auburn locks fell thick and fast. Two minutes of this, perhaps, then he smoothed the ruffled hair with caressing palm and sprayed me with a perfume much favoured by the negro housemaids of our sunny Southland.

'Twas done. He whacked the ends from my moustache with two deft snips, whipped off the towels, bowed, smiled and extended his hand for the fee—twenty-five centavos. I paid him and went weakly out into the morning air.<sup>1</sup> He had not injured me physically, I found, but the continued tension of my nerves had been almost more than I could bear.

In the quiet of our stall at the *Casa de Huespedes* Norm was packing our slender equipment for the journey to Santa Ana. When I wandered in, feeling entitled to sympathy, he only turned upon me, red-faced and sweating by large drops, to snarl:

"For the love of Pete! Stay out, will you? This pigeonhole's so small that I have to go outside to think."

So I went to sit in the patio with the daughter of our hostess, and the prospect of the mountain trails—mentioned by the girl with pious horror—seemed pleasant rather than the reverse.

Norm's timepiece was more energetic than those of the capital, so our hurried departure from the boarding-house brought us to the station a long half-hour before the train was scheduled to move. We bought tickets to Santa Ana and settled in a coach to wait as patiently as might be. At last the engineer, or conductor, or



CUARTEL (MILITARY HEADQUARTERS), SAN SALVADOR.



NATIONAL THEATRE, SAN SALVADOR



guard, or whoever it was we waited for, came down and we pulled out, only half an hour behind time.

The country-side beyond the capital was a revelation, after the brown aridity of the sea-coast, the dusty reaches of central Salvador. The land was green and fertile along the narrow track, which followed the curve of a foothill shoulder adjoining a low mountain range on the east. To the west was a deep valley, its bottom and sides, dark green with low, rank vegetation, lightened in colour by the patches of sugarcane and bananas.

Looking across this valley, miles away appeared the crest of another mountain chain, with the volcano of San Salvador rearing its brown head above the surrounding peaks. Upon the mountain-sides were many green squares marking cultivated areas, with here and there a narrow ribbon of silver gleaming in the afternoon sunlight to show where a little stream curved down to valley depths.

The track twisted and turned, sometimes descending, more often climbing, slight grades, or retaining the level, through deep cuts and around the jutting rock shoulders of the foothills, crossing stretches of smooth pastureland where we saw again the stately matapala with dark, glossy foliage affording dense, grateful shade in that land of white, intense sunlight.

At times we skirted the very edge of the precipice overhanging the sun-flooded valley, so that it seemed we might toss our sucked oranges down upon the red-tiled roofs of the toy cabins on the valley floor, far beneath us. Always the fine dust sifted in upon us, though in smaller quantities than in the neighbourhood of the capital. The passengers in our coach were cheerful-faced and friendly in their regard of us. Indeed,



throughout the afternoon whenever Norm looked back at a group of attractive, olive-skinned girls in the rear of the car, he was met with flashing smiles.

The police seemed less interested in us that afternoon than they had been on the journey to the capital. They boarded the train at each little huddle of huts, brown, diffident small men in faded blue uniforms and, less often, heavy native shoes worn on bare feet which never seemed comfortable in the cramping footgear. They strolled aimlessly through the coaches, and glanced curiously at us, but made no inquiries.

But when we reached the station of Santa Ana in the twilight—the end of steel in Salvador—a group of officials and policemen stood at the gate ready to search the passengers' luggage and persons for firearms. We evaded the inspection by the simple process—so often proved effective in dealing with Central American officialdom—of ignoring it and walking straight through the policemen who had moved forward to halt us.

On the sidewalk outside, a plain-clothes man with shield pinned to suspender beneath his coat in the fashion endorsed by all correspondence schools of detecting, and huge revolver at his hip, most courteously requested me to honour him by inscribing our names and occupations in his notebook. On a similar occasion in Zacatecoluca I had resurrected Julius Cæsar and George Washington from their tombs, registering them as coming “from La Union” and going “away.” So I felt that we owed the Republic of Salvador some amends and therefore scrawled our true *nombres y ocupaciones* upon the page headed *Touristas Norte Americano*. Then we returned the detective's formal bow and turned away in search of an inn.

A cheerful urchin guided us to the Hôtel Florida,

trotting ahead under the bundle which was almost as large as its carrier, and accepted a Salvadoran coin with grave dignity at the doorway. We came near to fainting, once inside, for an obsequious *mozo* led us into a spacious, tile-floored room, electrically lighted, with modern plumbing fixtures, real beds and several able-bodied chairs. When he saw me, a little later, sitting upon the edge of a bed to write, he dashed outside and in again with a table, which he placed before the open street door, and upon which he laid the notebook, taken firmly, but courteously, from my hands.

The springs of the beds consisted of a taut network of rawhide strips with the hair on, a style of *cama* very familiar to the last generation in Texas. When the strings have been properly stretched and the mattress is thick, no more comfortable bed may be had.

The wind had sprung up before our arrival and it was pleasantly cool in Santa Ana that evening. We sat near the open street door and watched the people stroll past, while we listened to the voice of the town—a combination of strumming guitars, faint love-songs and tinkling laughter floating through the dusk from where the young folk gathered. The night-sky was a canopy of blue-black velvet, spangled and powdered with stars and star-dust that glowed with a soft lustre like that of the topaz. Above the serrated crest of the mountain range hung the round, white moon, and high over our heads was the Southern Cross.

Breakfast was a triumphant meal of poached eggs, hot French rolls with fresh butter, black bean-paste, and coffee with unlimited milk and white sugar. We ate in the patio verandah in the cool, grey dawn, then stepped out into the street. Already the low, white buildings gleamed snowily in the yellow sunlight that

shone upon the northern hills, the ramparts of which swung in a great semicircle before the town, but the last breath of the dawn-wind still preserved a sparkling coolness in the air as we sauntered through narrow streets, past the *Teatro Santa Ana*, to the plaza and the old church.

In Santa Ana, as in almost every village and town we had seen, the church—and others of the more pretentious buildings—was fenced about by weatherbeaten scaffolding, as drearily useless, as depressing of aspect, as a rain-bleached skeleton. Upon the rickety platforms no workmen gathered; there were no signs I could ever detect that the scaffolding had ever served a purpose. Once, in Nicaragua, I inquired concerning the time when repairs would be commenced, and received a placid “*Quién sabe?*” from the townsman interrogated. But in Santa Ana a shopkeeper seated comfortably outside his doorway was more garrulous.

“Soon—perhaps,” he replied, then added of his own volition, “it has been there a long time, *el andamio* (the scaffolding).”

“About how long?”

He merely shrugged at this, but I persisted. If he had definite knowledge of this work I intended to get it.

“How long?”

But he had plainly exhausted the subject of interest.

“*Quién sabe?*” (“Who knows?”)

“How long? A month? A year?”

He reflected for a space.

“*Seguramente!*” (“Certainly!”) he replied at last.

“Certainly *what?* A month, or a year?”

He considered the matter—at least, he looked as if he *might* be considering. Then he puffed twice, three times, upon his cigarette and smiled upon us.

"A long time, señores."

Past plaza and church we went and into the shops of the German merchants, where we asked questions about the trails leading to Guatemala. But these soft, fat tradesmen knew little of anything that lay outside their great ledgers. They answered perfunctorily, reluctantly lifting pale, piggy eyes from the columns of debit and credit, anxious only to see our backs.

A big, sunburned Englishman whom we found superintending the unloading of machinery for the electric plant gave us the directions we desired, with a pessimistic sketch of the condition of the trails through the highlands of Salvador and Guatemala. Then we went to the hotel to pack our gear, followed by our chance acquaintance's sympathetic farewell.

"I'm glad it's your feet, not mine, that have to climb those trails," he shouted whimsically.

In our room at the Florida we packed our belongings in the hammocks, adding a carton of the black, sweet native cigarettes of which we had become enamoured, and a bountiful supply of matches. The clerk was horrified at thought of two *gringos* attempting passage of the wild mountain trails and tried hard in all charity to dissuade us from such a foolhardy venture. He told us of the brigands who haunted the mountain fastnesses and preyed upon travellers, at which Norm's eyes began to shine (he had been bemoaning the general peacefulness of the country), and shrugged at last as if washing his hands of all responsibility for the horrible fate which must surely overtake us.

At the northern edge of Santa we turned to look back. It was the prettiest little town we had seen in Central America, with the snowy walls of the houses in striking relief against the emerald jungle on three sides, the

morning sun glowing warmly upon red roofs, the spire of the old church rising against the deep, pure blue of the sky. We had been so cordially treated at the Florida that, although we had spent but one night beneath its hospitable roof, it seemed very homelike.

“The best hotel in the prettiest town in Central America,” Norm summed it up neatly, as we turned our faces toward the brown peaks to the north.



## CHAPTER VIII

### ACROSS THE ROOF OF SALVADOR

PAGES FROM "GIL BLAS"—TEXISTEPEQUE AND A JEST—ONLY HORSEMEN ARE GENTLEMEN—METAPAN AT DAWN—OUT-WALKING THE MULE-TRAINS—GUNPLAY ON THE INTER-REPUBLIC TRAIL—"THE LAST FRONTIER"—ADVENTURE IN THE "CHIQUMULIN COUNTRY"—SCRAMBLES UP AND DOWN TOWARD CHIQUMULA—ZACAPA AT LAST.

IT was a crowded road we followed to the north. Muleteers strode behind strings of pack-mules laden with boxes and bags, or great rope nets of maize-ears, bound "over the hills and far away." Solitary riders jogged townward or homeward on splendid black or tiger-striped mules. Women strode past us bearing huge burdens of country produce on their sleek, black hair, turned great, dark eyes on Norm—and smiled. Happy-go-lucky *mozos* travelling from village to village, farm to farm, with bundles on back or shoulder, their scabbarded machetes dangling from broad belts or carried in their hands like walking-sticks, nodded and smiled as they went by. We had no lack of company.

An elderly, bearded *hombre* waited for us to come up with him, and strode along with us for a few miles, asking many questions about the States, and giving us in turn the high-lights of his own placid existence on a little mountain farm beyond Texistepeque.

Every few yards along the roads were tiny booths of boughs, where for a few centavos the traveller might

purchase pork-fat *tamales*, *tortillas*, oranges, bananas, pineapples, various non-intoxicating drinks and a peculiarly malignant native beer.

At such a booth we halted at noon, to negotiate for breakfast. The old woman brought out *tamales* wrapped in green banana-leaves and still smoking from the kettle. These were very poor imitations of the highly seasoned *tamale* of Mexico. We nibbled gingerly at the tasteless concoction of boiled corn-meal, mixed with chunks of fat pork-skin still wearing the bristles, and turned quickly to the inky coffee. The old woman talked as we ate, of the troubles of the region, of the arid land and the struggles of the poor *peones* to wrest a living from the rock soil. No better illustration of the poverty of this section can be given than the fact that this old woman, set up as a shopkeeper, lacked by eighty centavos the change for a peso note worth an even half-dollar in currency of the United States.

At none of the booths we passed during the afternoon could we change that peso *billete*. Even in Texistepeque, reached in late afternoon, a straggling, unpaved town of low adobe and pole-walled houses, we went from one to another of the *tiendas* in search of the small currency necessary to the traveller in those parts without success. In none of the shops could we find a Salvadoran who would admit to possession of so much money. At last the *Jeje Político*, whom we found enthroned on a bench outside the *comandancia*, a man of vast girth and apparently equal good nature, not only sent a boy to a *pulquería* to change the bill, but also arranged for our meals and lodgings.

"The saloons have all the money," he told us placidly, in effect.

"Then why not do away with saloons?" I inquired



I CLIMB A NINETY-FOOT PALM AT LA LIBERTAD.



mischievously. "We have done so in the *Estados Unidos*."

"What! Abolish the *pulquerías*!" He was very much awake at the suggestion. "Impossible! It would mean revolution. Has it not produced revolution in the United States?"

"No. Only bootleggers." Then, in payment for my pleasantry, I had to explain in detail the mechanics of the term, as it were. But when finally he grasped the story of the origin of the phrase, the result was worth while. He broke into a roar of laughter that fairly shook the verandah rafters, and quivered like a vast jelly. Then he explained with vivid pantomime to the gathered loungers and they joined in his bellowing mirth. Judging from the exhibition, "*piernas del botas*" is now adopted into the language at Texistepeque.

The same *muchacho* who had effected the changing of the *billete* led us to a little adobe hut on the outskirts of the town, where an old woman listened to the order of the *Jefe Político* respectfully, and set out a meal. She accepted and smoked our cigarettes as smilingly as she gave us the best her larder afforded. When we had eaten she squatted once more upon the dirt-floor of the cabin, with a favourite cur at her side and a green parakeet on a rude perch near-by, and took up her interrupted task of rolling small cigars. When we told her that she was a cook without rival she would have blushed, but that her *colorado claro* complexion prevented, and told us, in effect, to "quit kidding her." But the price of the meal—given immediately following the compliment—was very moderate!

Two bare cots in the yard behind the cabin—rectangular frameworks with the same lattice-work of rawhide thongs as that of our beds at Santa Ana—were indicated



as our beds for the night. Even when we covered the thongs with the hammocks and rolled in them, and covered ourselves with all the spare clothing from our packs, we were too chilled by the keen mountain air to sleep except in broken snatches. Then the dogs, the chickens, pigeons and guinea-fowl of the neighbourhood disputed possession with us, and a disreputable sow, wandering in after midnight, overturned Norm's cot. We were ready to leave by three, but it was nearly six when the old woman began to move about inside the cabin.

It required such a time to get the fire going in the mud beehive that the sun, rising in business-like fashion at six-thirty, found us just sitting down to our meal of fried bananas, cold *tortillas* and *frijoles* and coffee. We paid our score of forty centavos, shook hands very gravely with our hostess and were off, striding through the marvellous coolness that would so soon be replaced by a heat like that of a furnace seven times heated.

Others were upon the *camino* before us—mule-trains, soft-eyed women and girls upon horses and mules, accompanied either by their lords and masters or by respectful *mozos* who frowned upon the passers-by who, like Norm, stared too long at the fair riders.

Sturdy women of the *peon* class, their bright-hued *mantillas* serving more the purpose of head-pad than hood, swung along with that graceful carriage that comes from bearing head-burdens, or perched upon the top of huge packs surmounting ancient *caballos* or tiny mules.

As we moved over the brown, hard road at a steady, mile-eating pace, with the jays squalling at us from roadside trees, watching this busy road before us, I thought of Kim and his *lama*, following the roads of India ; knew the urge that keeps the wanderer on the trail.

Many times before I had felt the yearning to follow unknown roads through new countries, the vague, yet powerful emotion that comes with hearing the wild goose cry, but never before had it seemed to be so definite a thing. I could analyse, dissect it—almost, that marvelous morning.

So we went on toward the mountains that loomed against the northern sky, the nearer peaks sharply outlined against the clear blue, with wisps of snowy cloud floating lazily about the summits, while farther ranges piled shoulder after shoulder in hazy, lavender masses in the far distance, until sky and mountain-crest became one, indistinguishable.

As we went we stepped into the footprints of this procession that might have walked from the pages of my old *Gil Blas*, swarthy, red-petticoated women and all. Up one incline and down the next, so ran the trail, for we had reached the foothills. Eight o'clock saw us approaching Santamición, a half-dozen pole-walled, palm-thatched huts drowsing life away beside the highway. At a roadside bakery of the village we halted to buy bananas—*guinéas*, she called them—and dry, flour-meal cakes from a strapping, coquettish woman. Then we marched on, eating as we went.

At noon we turned into the yard of the Hacienda San Francisco, a large cattle-ranch, and sat down upon a verandah edge to watch the women in the cook-house. They were baking *tortillas* on wholesale scale, and as the flat cakes came out of the kitchen two *mozos* piled them in an ox-cart. We saw the cart go creaking off toward the distant *potreros*, laden with the *tortillas* to the height of four feet above the side-boards, the "chuck-wagon" of the hacienda, carrying supplies to men at work on the distant ranges. As we sat in the shade of the verandah

the foreman trotted up on a great bay mule, and of him we asked breakfast.

The Spanish word for "gentleman," *caballero*, when literally translated means "a man on a horse." The inference is that gentlemen never walk. We were afoot, therefore we could not be gentlemen. So ran the foreman's ratiocination. *Bueno!* To the cook-house he sent us to eat with the *peones*. The meal was good and the woman who served us both cleanly and courteous, so when we couldn't prevail upon the foreman to accept pay for the food we presented the cook with a half-peso and went on. We were as content as if we had been invited to join the company we could see through an open window, gathered about the snowy table in the big house.

Only too often, not only in Salvador, but in our own land as well, the sweat-soaked labourer of the *cabaña* is a more interesting individual than his "superiors" in the *casa grande*. The two invalided *savoneras* who had eaten with us in the kitchen, with the tales of their wounds—surely they had been more interesting than anything we could have heard at the ranch-owner's formal table.

The little, squatty chap with the cherubic face and easy, brilliant smile—he had come within an inch of decapitation by the machete of a *guaro*-crazed comrade, in a drunken brawl over a girl; his own machete had been out that day, though his boyish face gave little promise of murderous wrath. His companion had met a *tigre* in a jungle-*potrero*; he had killed the brute with his machete, but his horribly scarred face gave token of the length of *tigre*-claws. Reflecting upon this, I couldn't feel that we had missed anything by going to the *peon* quarters.

The *mulateros*' labour, unlike that of the other classes of Central America, seems to go on from dawn to dark. While their compatriots were asleep in the shade of the cabins the muleteers came striding through the thick, brown dust behind their weary beasts, brigand-like figures in broad, straw hats, thin, pyjama-like suits of faded and tattered blue denim and rude rawhide sandals which, like the American Indian on the warpath, they seem to manufacture as they go. They lead a roving, vagabond existence, sleeping wherever night overtakes them, the boys apparently growing up on the march, for with every mule-train we saw these miniature *mulateros* with their fathers, replicas in every detail from hat to sandals and machete of their elders.

Beneath the trees overhanging the Rio San Francisco, a mile or so beyond the hacienda where we had been, Lazarus-like, suitors for the scraps from the rich man's table, we came upon a mule-train halted for the midday meal. Slatternly women were busied about the cooking-fires, warming *frijoles* and boiling plantains for their lords. The company—except for the absence of fire-arms—bore a striking resemblance to one of the Mexican "armies" I had often seen in Sonora, and were no more hostile in their greetings.

The heat proved effective brake to our legs that blazing afternoon. We walked very slowly, making frequent halts at the cabins which were scattered along the trail here to ask for water. The canteen seemed to hold nothing; a swallow apiece and it was drained—while we remained thirsty. The stagnant air fairly scorched the skin and the white road glared like molten metal beneath the low-hanging sun, until the eyeballs ached from the strain of staring down it.

Past the river it seemed a land deserted. The whole



landscape was empty of life in whatever direction we turned ; the people, the animals, even the birds, had searched out the coolest spots they knew and waited for evening to bring relief. They gave us water reluctantly ; apparently because of the exertion entailed in the effort. But we came to a large, well-built house set in a stony brown clearing beside the road, where the inhabitants seemed heedless of the heat which prostrated their neighbours.

A man sprawled on the dilapidated verandah, with a bottle beside him. When we asked for water he extended the flask, then shrugged indifferently when we refused, and hallooed to the rioting folk inside, who were singing, just then, in a maudlin drone. A slatternly girl of fifteen or so, half-naked, who kept her arm across her breasts in some faint concession to modesty, brought us a gourdful of water.

The house itself, which was modelled on modern lines far superior to the cabins we had seen along the road, seemed so out of keeping with its animalish tenants that I inquired its history. Evidently it was a well-worn theme. He took another jolt from the flask and told us how a wealthy young man of Santa Ana, who held this and much other land in the region, had built the house and laid out elaborate grounds for his prospective bride. But the girl had jilted him, and the youth had sworn that the estate which was to have been a monument to the girl's supposed virtues should never be occupied by "good people." It should be turned over to his *peones* and its increasing dilapidation would serve as sign-manual of her real character.

We looked inside, at the filthy pallets thrown upon filthier floors, at the drunken huddle of brutish men and blowsy, half-naked women, at the two scrawny,



pimplly-faced babies asprawl upon piles of rags in the corner, and decided that, if the appearance of the place was any indication of the fickle one's true character, the young man should have rejoiced at his escape.

In mid-afternoon came a glimpse of water to the nor'west. Balboa, in his journeyings about Central America, had at least an idea of what lay before him, but we were only amateur Columbuses, at best, with a map whose chief claim to distinction was its absolute, unfailing inaccuracy.

A passing *hombre* informed us that we looked upon Lake Huija, which, fed by the Rio Desagua, forms a portion of the boundary between Salvador and Guatemala. A mile farther and we heard the unmistakable sound of running water from behind the leafy screen on the right of the road. We parted the branches, looked down, and saw below us the Rio Desagua, a narrow, crystal-clear stream.

Without heeding the pair of giggling girls riding past, we scrambled down to the river-bank and undressed joyously beside a long, deep pool.

A great alligator floating placidly fifty yards downstream had no terrors for us. We laid the six-guns on the bank within reach and splashed away dirt and fatigue in the cool water. When we were dressed and once more upon the road, we felt as if we had just commenced the tramp. Also, we had developed a most amazing appetite—apiece.

At a booth near the river a girl sold ginger-cakes at a centavo each, and by the presentation of a cigarette to a friendly *mozo* in charge of a squealing herd of swine, we got the information that the Hacienda San Diego lay but a half-league distant. The road was like most *caminos* of Central America—a mere cleared track

across the country, rocky and choked with dust, seeming to twist out of its course to find a hill to climb. But with the sinking of the sun had come a pleasant coolness and Norm's watch proclaimed that it was an even quarter-hour later that we stood on the verandah of the hacienda and asked for hospitality.

The son of our host had been educated in California and he knew San Francisco as well as we. He jingled up as we sat at *comida* in the verandah, accompanied by a group of happy-go-lucky young folk. Most of the young men had degrees from American or English colleges and they made us feel very much at home that evening.

After the meal we went in a body to the sugar-making. Here the *peones* of Señor Valiente boiled *panela*, the crude brown sugar of the poor, in the red glare of a wood fire. The mill was most primitive; two corrugated iron rollers set upright in a rude frame and turned by a cog in opposite directions. Stalks of cane were thrust between these rollers, the oxen which supplied the motive-power commenced circling about the mill, drawing the beam that turned the cog and the rollers, and the juice from the pressed cane dripped into a container underneath.

The ground for yards about the mill was carpeted with the dry, pressed stalks, a soft, fragrant mattress. We sprawled at full-length to watch the boiling. Here a great iron kettle, filled with sap, was set over an open fire, which was fed with dry stalks by a bare-breasted Amazon as stolid of eye as the oxen turning the press. But when the flickering firelight struck gleams from her eyeballs, she was transformed for the moment; she became a pagan vestal virgin tending the sacrificial flame upon a *teocallis* of her bloody ancestral gods.

Young Valiente informed us that the sugar-making was his mother's private industry, out of the proceeds of which she was invariably wheedled and threatened by the priests, who came regularly to visit her as soon as the *panela* was sold.

"When *I* get my hands on this property," said the youngster emphatically, "what the priests get they will be able to put in one eye!"

Despite the protests of our hosts we swung our hammocks between the verandah-posts and made our farewells that evening, for Metapan lay only a league to the north and we planned a pre-sunrise departure, much as we liked our entertainment.

We woke punctually at four as we had planned and found coffee and cold *tortillas* ready for us in a cabin near the big house, as young Valiente had promised. The inky, scalding liquid fairly shocked us into wakefulness and we set off at a racing pace for Metapan.

Dawn broke just as we came to the town. There was smoke rising from the tiled roof of the first low, white house, and we stopped to ask for coffee and food. As we finished the meal and came again into the street an apologetic little policeman greeted us and escorted us to the *comandancia*, where the *Comandante*, having first put on his coat with the epaulets upon it and buckled on his sword, inspected our *pasaportes*. Since we showed no other arms than the silver-hilted sheath-knife at my belt, we were bowed out of The Presence and granted permission to proceed.

Except in size, as I have remarked before, the average Central American pueblo might have been poured out of the same mould as its neighbours up and down the road. The difference is usually in the size. Unless some peculiarity in the nature of the country has caused

a change in the customary plan of town-building—development, rather—there will be the same rows of one-storied whitewashed adobe or stone houses and shops converging upon a central plaza, with the pole-walled, palm-thatched huts of the poor on the ragged outskirts of the pueblo. The spires of the churches frown down upon the plazas in every town I have seen, and it seems most fitting that the pleasuring of these people, whose lives are so overshadowed by the *padres*, should be done beneath the shadow of the church-tower.

The road out of Metapan was smooth—for a time. We swung on, uphill and downhill, hemmed in always by the brown mountains, sometimes on a plateau as level as a billiard table—and as green—then dropping into a fertile little valley and laboriously climbing out again. We were drenched with perspiration and our faces fairly leaked water that dripped from the points of our mustachios and soaked the hammock rolls.

Foot-passengers were few on this wild stretch of the *Camino Real* to Zacapa, Guatemala. Mule-trains still passed us frequently, laden with packages of all shapes lashed to the saw-buck pack-saddles. The mules, it seemed to me, enjoyed the marvellous vistas across the deep cañons less than anyone else in all of Salvador, though Norm was beginning to say all sorts of unprintable things about scenery.

But it was worth all the trouble of the ascent to sprawl upon one's back on a grassy knoll on "the roof of the world" and watch the fleecy cirrus clouds float across the serene blue heaven. There was an elemental quiet in these regions which made it seem impossible that within a few miles, comparatively, were bustling, thriving cities. One found the frame of mind for meditation. A *zopilote* or two hanging like stuffed birds



high overhead ; the rustle of the grass under the light breeze ; otherwise no sign nor sound of life.

There seems to be something about existence in the mountains which marks the hill-man as different from his compatriot of the plains ; from time immemorial, history tells us, a different breed has dwelt among the peaks. We noted that the muleteers who threaded the mountain passes were not as the light-skinned, bovine-featured Salvadorans of the coast. They strode along behind the mule-trains with machetes hanging from their belts or carried beneath their arms ; their straw hats were cocked at an aggressive angle upon their black shock-heads ; they looked the passer-by squarely, even pugnaciously, in the eye.

We passed a mule-train unburdened save for the empty pack-saddles, upon which nearly a dozen brigandish figures perched. A mile farther there was a jingling and shouting behind us and the train clattered up at a spanking trot. We drew well out of the trail ; but when half the mules had passed, the remainder of the train closed in behind us and halted and we found ourselves pocketed with our backs to a low cliff, the riders in a semicircle about us. They sat and stared at us, and we, after making due allowance for the circumstances, decided without hesitation that a more villainous collection of faces we had seldom seen at large.

Their *capitan*, a burly *hombre* of impressive, curled mustachios, asked us if we cared to ride. When we declined, he inquired if we had money to buy mules from him. Meanwhile the band was edging closer, with machetes creeping ominously into the foreground.

Our six-shooters were holstered beneath our shirts and the only visible weapon we bore was the silver-



hilted hunting-knife at my waist. Their attitude was becoming too threatening to suit us, particularly after having been filled with stories of bandits wherever we had stopped since Santa Ana. We looked at each other furtively.

"I don't think there's a gun in the gang," said Norm, and after a hasty inspection I agreed with him.

The captain of the muleteers—or bandits—was watching us intently. Now he broke in to command that we speak Spanish—so that *he* could understand! Also, he wanted to know what was in our bundles. This was growing entirely too much like banditry, so we produced the six-guns with motions as nearly like Bill Hart's as we could contrive.

The gang gave back hastily before the gun-muzzles and paused hesitantly on the opposite side of the trail. Their indecision strengthened our belief that they were armed only with the machetes and daggers we could see at their belts. We had little fear that they would rush us. None wished to be the first to collect a bullet; each swarthy rascal urged his neighbour toward us, but declined to lead the way.

"Tell 'em to scat!" suggested Norm, and I snapped out a command with all the menace I could crowd into the word, and we emphasized the order with motions of gun-muzzles. They turned back in the direction from which they had come, moving slowly and looking back at us often. Then Norm the Irrepressible sent three bullets into the ground at their mules' heels and the retreat became a rout. We watched the cloud of dust disappear in the distance, then hurried on toward the north, very thankful to get out of the scrape with no more difficulty.

By ten o'clock we had covered fifteen miles, distancing

several fast-walking mule-trains. So, filled with the pride of performance and puffed up because we were lean and brown and hard as nails, we halted at the Hacienda Zapote, a rugged sugar-farm in the valley we followed, set beside a swift-flowing mountain stream, and asked for hospitality.

A sugar-mill was crushing cane for the boiling, and while we waited in the verandah for breakfast we watched the congregated children—each with a long stick of cane at his lips—playing about the press. A shy little girl set out eggs and black beans, *tortillas*, cheese and *café negro* upon a rude mahogany table, then brought us a great plateful of *panuella*, delicious molasses candy made from the fresh sap of the cane.

It was too hot upon the road to go on, so we hunted out a quiet pool in the little river that foamed over a rocky bed between walls of green undergrowth. It was evident, from the attention our movement attracted among the *peones* at the mill, that the stream was not ordinarily used for such utilitarian purposes.

The troop of children deserted the sugar-mill and came to sit comfortably upon the bank and watch us bathe and shave. The natives' idea of modesty not being that of the northern races, our half-clothed condition failed to shock them. They commented in whispers upon our razors, the shaving brush and metal mirror. The last was much admired by the little girls. Throughout the trip it was Norm's delight to hold the mirror carelessly and then, by apparent accident, let it fall. There was always a gasp of consternation from the onlookers, followed by a low murmur of astonishment at sight of it lying unbroken.

In early afternoon the heat had somewhat subsided, so we shouldered our hammock rolls and said good-bye

to the hospitable folk of Zapote. The narrow trail zigzagged insanely up the mountain-side toward the *frontera*, in ascents almost impossible to the mule-trains.

All the landscape before us was mountainous. To the right and left and straight ahead lay chain after mountain chain, the marshalled ramparts of the Cordilleras. From where we stood on the trail above Zapote we might look down into fifty narrow, deep valleys, each inhabited, where the rank green of the sugarcane blotched the russet brown of the surrounding slopes.

There were inclines where we had to dig in our toes and fight for each inch of ground gained, only to slip and slide down the other side—and climb again. We panted up the long slope of a mountain toward the crest that reared tantalizingly before us and, attaining it, found that it was only a tiny, projecting knob jutting upward from the mountain-side, and the peak was as elusively distant, apparently, as when we started.

But *pié por pié*—foot by foot—goes the traveller in the mountains, according to the native saying, and *pié por pié* we were struggling toward our goal, though sometimes that seemed hard to believe.

So, with perspiration oozing from every pore, soaking khaki trousers and flannel shirt and even seeping through the oil-tanned leather of our boots, we scrambled down a rocky slope and broke through the wall of green jungle that hedged the Rio Seba. This was more or less a solemn moment, for the stream marked the boundary between Salvador and Guatemala. We approached the stepping-stones gravely, then Norm slipped and measured his length in the shallow water and all gravity was banished. We skipped across like



ROADSIDE BAKERY. SANTAMICION.



GRINDING SUGAR-CANE, HACIENDA ZAPOTE, NEAR GUATEMALAN FRONTIER.





schoolboys and sat down to smoke a cigarette on the soil of Guatemala. Like Huckleberry Finn, Norm remarked upon the fact that the country was green, while on the map it was coloured yellow.

Alotepeque Ermita, we had been told at Zapote, lay a league north of the frontier, the first Guatemalan town on the road. A *legua* seemed only a step or two, so we went leisurely along the trail, pausing often upon the hill-tops to look over the country. For three leagues we traversed a fertile land, where in the tiny valleys and by the roadside the grass, watered by springs that gushed everywhere from the rocks, was vividly green, a striking contrast to the barren brown stretches of Northern Salvador.

At dusk we came into Alotepeque, only to be told that there were two towns of this name, Alotepeque “ Viejo,” or “ Old Alotepeque,” and Alotepeque “ Ermita.” We had still a league to go to reach the latter.

Darkness fell as we stumbled along the rocky way beyond “ Viejo.” The “ *una legua* ” was stretching marvellously, it seemed, and there was never a sign of habitation. Then, from the utter, utter darkness ahead sounded the rattling challenge of a single dog-voice. We laughed suddenly, together, for the same recollection had come to us both at the sound.

On the steamer coming south we had listened often to an old Norwegian windjammer skipper’s arraignment of coastwise masters. Invariably he wound up his volley with the disgusted roar :

“ Along te coast you go, andt you say, ‘ Py Yiminy ! T’ere’s te old Newfoundland barking. Py Yupiter ! Ve’re off Point Lobos ! ’ Yah ! Dog-barking navigators ! ”

We were much the same, down there on the tortuous,

thread-narrow trails, whenever the darkness found us still abroad. There were seldom lights in the native huts, save, perhaps, a faint flicker of red firelight glimpsed through the cabin's airy walls. So we listened eagerly for any such token of civilization (inhabitation, I should have said) as a dog's bark.

We stumbled onward, to emerge from the trees a hundred yards farther on and reach a tiny clearing beside the trail. The dog retreated before us until he was behind the hut, keeping up a vocal rearguard action as he went. Some of the same suspicion that seemed to tinge his warning of our approach showed in the seamed and dusky face of the old witch we found huddled over the cooking-fire within.

She had *nada*—nothing—to eat, she mumbled; but Norm, the explorer and forager of experience, unearthed a gourd-dish full of cold *frijoles* and a stack of foot-wide *tortillas* which, though leathery, were edible. She gave up the battle then, and brought out coffee, as black as ink and twice as strong. The dog sneaked in and watched from a corner as we ate, showing his teeth at every sudden move we made.

Two and a half reales the old woman set as the price of her hospitality. She grumbled exceedingly because we had no Guatemalan currency and must pay her in silver of Salvador. For two more reales we might swing our hammocks in the hut, but we had been watching her busy fingers until a sympathetic crinkling of the spine had warned us that the hut was already overcrowded. We shouldered our rolls and went on up the road to a *potrero*, where we could swing the hammocks between two trees.

The air of the highlands was thin and very cool; our bedroom, beside a mountain brook and behind a screen of bushes that hid us from passers-by upon the trail, was

too well ventilated, even though we slept "boots and saddles." Nothing more alarming than a curious cow wandering up shortly after midnight disturbed us, but we shivered under the lash of a high, chill wind.

Before daybreak we were ready for the march, and as soon as the east was grey enough to show us our road we shouldered the packs and set out.

Evidently the *Comandante* of Alotepeque Ermita bore a reputation for severity throughout the region, for every *hombre* we passed, every *peon* at his cabin door, shouted after us that we could not pass Ermita unless we had local passports.

A quarter-hour of brisk tramping brought us to the town, which was a trifle larger than "Viejo," but the same straggling, poverty-stricken clutter of adobe and pole-walled shacks. It was plain that our approach had been heralded, for the soldiers standing guard on the outskirts of the hamlet shouted to us as soon as we drew within hearing that *El Capitan* Felipe Sellama awaited us at the *comandancia*. As a matter of record, he came to meet us in the little plaza.

He had been so held up to us as a martinet that we anticipated some such difficulty as that at Playa Grande, but he merely inspected our local passports—he confessed that he "had no English"—and asked why we had not reached Ermita the night before, as he had expected us to do! So does news of a *gringo* precede him in Guatemala.

We explained that we had tired of walking and so had slept beside the road. Captain Sellama gave a little "tchk" of disapproval at this. He told us of the murder of two Englishmen a fortnight before on the road between Ermita and Concepcion, the next town, giving us sanguinary details of the manner in which the murderers

had first disembowelled and then decapitated the luckless Britons. Our apparent lack of arms—which, he explained, he would have been compelled to confiscate had we borne them!—gave an added depth of earnestness to his lecture.

When we asked for food Captain Sellama sent us to his own house, the largest in the village, and sat by while we ate, surrounded by a dozen or so of ragamuffins evidently very much under the *Comandante's* thumb, who hung upon his slightest word.

After eating, mindful of the difficulties which had beset us in Salvador because of our lack of small notes, we inquired of the *Comandante* where we could exchange the Salvadoran money we still possessed for currency of Guatemala. Sellama directed one of the interested citizens squatted near-by to effect *el cambiar*.

The monetary system of Guatemala is the most marvellous of any in vogue in the Five Republics. Exchange varies with the locality, with the intelligence of the parties to the transaction, with the time of day and the state of the weather, I verily believe.

The citizen addressed by *El Comandante*—who looked as if he could have taken the pauper's oath at a moment's notice, without any additional preparation—reached within his ragged coat and from an inside pocket produced a bundle of tattered, filthy paper money fully eight inches thick. With the Salvadoran five-peso note on the ground before him he began to strip Guatemalan *billetes* of one, two and five pesos from his packet. Exchange was twenty pesos for an American dollar that morning—the sun was now shining brightly—so we received fifty Guatemalan pesos for the Salvadoran note.

The *Comandante* refused to let us go on without an escort. He raised his voice in a shrill yell, and one of the



*soldados* within the *comandancia* downstreet came at the double. This soldier was to accompany us to Concepcion, to guard us from the perils of the road. We felt greatly comforted by his escort, for he was nearly fourteen years of age, almost as tall as a short rifle, and heavily armed with a pair of woven-grass saddle-bags. These last were the marks of his office, I think. When we had bade Captain Sellama *adios* and were striding up the trail, the little soldier plied us with a rain of questions :

Was it true that we intended to visit Guatemala City ? He had never been there, but he had heard that it was a most wonderful place—*muy grande* !

We were *Americanos* ? Then perhaps we could tell him whether the story of Juan Sanchez, the saddler, was true. He had heard Sanchez swear by the Virgin that in a great city of *Los Estados Unidos*, called “ Nuollins ” (New Orleans ?), were houses so tall that one had to lean back and stare straight upward to see their roofs. But surely this was a lie of the baldest variety, for why should men build houses like mountains ?

Every youth of fifteen and upward must serve three months a year in the army. We had heard before that the volunteer system was formerly in vogue—in this wise : When Guatemala was mobilizing her troops for war with Mexico, some years back, a corporal’s guard of soldiers arrived in Guatemala City bearing a note to the *Comandante* there and escorting fifteen men tied together with a long, new rope. Shorn of its Latin floweriness of salutation, the note read somewhat as follows :

“ Señor,—I have the honour to transmit herewith fifteen volunteers for military service. More will follow. Please return the rope.”

We kept up our usual road-gait and the boy was alternately far behind or panting beside us. So we covered



the difficult mountain trail and came to the outskirts of Concepcion, a picturesque hamlet of perhaps nine hundred souls nestling in a green amphitheatre among russet mountains, with a crystal-clear stream curving past the southern edge of the pueblo. At the ford we were halted by a youngster, armed with a rifle carved from wood, who would not let us pass until our guide had panted up to give the password. It was given in a mysterious whisper, but I caught a sound suspiciously like "*tortillas* !"

At the whitewashed *comandancia*, fronting on the plaza from which the half-dozen unpaved streets of the town rayed out, we found a major-general in command of a garrison of some twenty ragged Guatemalticos of all ages. The Second Commandant took our passports and delivered them, with a deep bow, to the hands of His Highness the Commandant himself. They were inspected and found satisfactory, then we asked and received permission to photograph the garrison—a privilege, incidentally, not often granted to foreigners by the suspicious Guatemalans.

Diplomatic relations became a trifle strained when I told the *Comandante* of our tilt with the picket at the ford and inquired whether the wooden gun was rifle or shotgun. The general seemed sensitive on the subject of armament.

At a little shop near the grass-grown plaza we got cigarettes—thin, white cylinders of very black and very powerful tobacco, which were bundled together in faggots of twenty. They were very inferior to the black cigarettes of Salvador, but since we could get nothing else, nor papers to roll the Durham purchased in San Salvador, we took beggars' choice. When we asked for cigarette papers the shopkeeper gave us "*No hoy*"

("Not to-day"), but assured us that in Quezaltepeque we would find great shops literally filled with cigarette papers.

Past Concepcion the trail was almost impassable. We dug in our toes and jammed our Stetsons grimly over our ears, alternately climbing breathlessly and slipping and sliding on the corresponding descent. At noon the trail zigzagged up to a grassy tableland wooded, as were the black hills around, with great pines and cedars. The way across the *mesa* spread out until it was nearly fifty yards wide, and comparatively smooth. It brought us soon to a little hut nestling in a sheltered hollow among the trees, and the woman who was its only occupant at the time set out hard black beans in gourd bowls, with hot *tortillas*, soft-boiled eggs and *café negro*. Four pesos the meal cost us—the equivalent of twenty cents in American money.

In this hut was not a utensil which might not have belonged to the five-hundred-years-dead ancestors of the woman who fed us. Gourd dishes and earthenware cooking-vessels answered the woman's every need. The *tortillas*, rolled into cylinders, served her, as they had served us, for fork and spoon. The mistress of the hut herself, with a slight change or two of costume, might have been her own grandmother, a dozen times removed; she was short and broad of shoulders, muscled like a man, with features of the pure Indian type, chocolate-red of colouring and boldly aquiline of cast. She spoke an odd patois of Spanish and Indian, barely understandable except with the aid of gestures; her manner was neither friendly nor the reverse, but rather tolerant.

As we sat outside her door and smoked, a party of men—the hook-nosed Indians of the region—came up the trail from the north and stopped to stare blankly

at us. Two of them bore guns, ancient, long-barrelled smoothbores with percussion caps; the others had machetes and long-handled billhooks, half axe, half brush-knife. They held a brief discussion in the Indian patois, then the eldest man came over to where we sat and nodded to us.

He asked our destination and our nationality, but made no comment. After a sharp look at the packs beside us he put a question to the Indian woman in the doorway behind us and she grunted in apparent affirmative, and added a brief sentence whose purport I didn't get. He looked again at our packs, then returned to his fellows, and they all moved off on a narrow path shooting off at left angle to the main trail. In a moment or two all were out of sight in the pines.

We rested for an hour, then took up the march again along the broad way between avenues of pines. As we reached the edge of the *mesa* where the trail contracted again and led downward into a valley, we turned to look back. The woman was leaning in her doorway, staring after us, but her face was blank of all expression.

The soil of the trail was white and chalky, in sharp contrast to the huge boulders of black, volcanic rock which bordered it. Quezaltepeque, the woman had told us with aid of enumerating fingers and blurred Spanish, was seven *leguas* ahead of us. We felt as if we wore the fabled seven-league boots, for the high, keen air of the mountains was invigorating as fine wine, and the clouds had massed about the peaks, almost obscuring the sun. A cool wind whipped our faces on the high places.

We watched the trail narrowly, and the undergrowth along it, walking with thumb hooked in open shirt-front

near to revolver-butt. For this region, known colloquially as the "Chiquimulin Country," bears an unsavoury reputation. The inhabitants are chiefly men with a price on their heads—thieves, murderers, army deserters; every criminal who can escape flies to the wooded mountains of the south where an army could hardly capture him.

Mr. Feeley, an old-timer in Guatemala, had advised us in Granada not to attempt crossing this region, and had I been alone it is probable that I should have heeded his warning. But Norm, once he learned that there was prospect of excitement, would hear of no other route, so we had adhered to the itinerary made in Chinandega.

There were few wayfarers in this neighbourhood, no cabins along the trail. Occasionally a fierce-eyed, hook-nosed *hombre* came swinging toward us, bearing machete or billhook, shuffling forward at a peculiar, rapid gait, half dogtrot, half walk, in which his sandalled feet barely cleared the ground, chanting a monotonous-refrained trail-song as accompaniment, apparently, to his progress.

A few of the men we met had ancient guns, like those of the party which had halted at the hut, but whether for protection or for hunting we couldn't tell. However, when in a wild spot a couple of miles beyond our halting-place of midday, where a great heap of tumbled rocks lay beside the trail, a gun-muzzle projected over a boulder and the word "*Alto!*" (Halt!) sounded sharply, we decided that the guns were carried for more sinister purpose than mere food-getting. We dropped flat and rolled behind a great boulder on the opposite side of the trail, and I shouted, "What is it you desire?"

"Money!" came the reply, and the voice was



suspiciously like that of the man who had spoken to us at the hut.

From what we could see of this gun, it was like all the others we had observed—of the type which is about as dangerous to the person firing as to the object at which aimed. With the observation some part of our uneasiness was removed and we worried chiefly over being flanked by other banditti and chopped small. It would have seemed anti-climax to submit tamely to robbery by brigands armed with these smoothbores of Revolutionary vintage, so we shoved the six-guns forward and put a careful shot apiece into the heap of boulders that protected the highwaymen.

One bullet struck a rock close to the gun-muzzle and there ensued a tremendous explosion. A hail of small shot whistled through the air high over our heads, then the muzzle disappeared suddenly and we heard the bushes crackling as the would-be bandits dashed up the mountain-side, running low in cover of the underbrush, for we could see nothing more than waving bushes. We sent a few shots in their general direction to harden their idea of emigration, then pushed on rapidly toward Quezaltepeque.

A *peon* at work in a rock-walled field leaned upon his bill-hook to inform us dispassionately that it was three leagues to the town, but that the road was no better than it might be. We stepped out with renewed energy, sure that the last half, at least, of the *mozo's* information was truth.

Cabins began to appear, some of them clinging to tiny fertile spots among the boulders high above the trail, some near the road, with their cultivated fields of maize and bananas and beans a half-mile almost straight up the mountain-side above them. The road was



bounded by walls of the black volcanic rock, unmortared but well constructed, and we wondered at this unusual labour. Even the little fields of the Indians were enclosed by these well-built walls, which must have required many days of industrious labour to build, for they were fully four feet in height and two in thickness.

Nearly all the cabins were walled with adobe brick, for the reason, we supposed, that it was easier to handle than the stones. But the framework would inevitably be of mahogany beams! It reminded me of that ancient Texas adage anent "a thirty-dollar hawss an' a hundred-dollar saddle."

We passed several groups of Indians coming homeward from their little fields with bill-hooks upon their shoulders, and women trotting along the trail with huge head-loads of bananas, black beans or maize. None offered or returned greeting.

As we drew near to Quezaltepeque, glimpsed in the distant valley as the trail rounded a mountain shoulder, coffee-*fincas* began to appear among the pines and cedars of the hill-sides.

On the outskirts of the town was an enormous—considering the population of the place—cemetery, filled with the most ornate painted monuments I have ever seen. Adjoining the cemetery was a large stone building bearing the name of the Dictator, Manuel Estrada Cabrera—of whom more later—upon its Grecian-Doric front. With the exception of the cemetery and this incongruous structure, Quezaltepeque was much the same as Concepcion, with narrow, unpaved streets lined with low, white buildings, debouching upon a central plaza which was nothing more than a dusty open space.

We got food at a house near the plaza, where a sign

upon the house-front announced the dwelling of a *barbero y cocinero*—barber and cook! For a consideration, the slatternly, expatriated woman of Salvador who seemed to own the place permitted us to swing our hammocks in her rear verandah, which overlooked a stone courtyard. When we had eaten and washed in the horse-trough, we turned upstreet for a look at the town.

The country-people had come to town to attend some *fiesta*—which reminds me that it is said that Guatemalans of the devout type recognize three hundred and eighty-odd separate saints' days, each of which should be kept as a holiday!—and were encamped upon the plaza by the hundreds, each little group squatted about a tiny fire, upon which the cooking-pots were steaming. All were in gala dress, their straw hats decorated with flowers and round, yellow fruit stitched to the band.

The stores were thronged with people, laden down with the bulky currency of the *pais*. In one of the shops we changed an American twenty-dollar banknote for four hundred pesos of the beautifully engraved, but often dilapidated, Guatemalan paper, and I stuffed the huge bundle inside my shirt. The keeper of the *tienda* had dealt with *Americanos* before, he told us; in obedience to a command his daughter—the most comely girl we had yet seen in Guatemala, by the way—brought out a tin cash-box which he unlocked with a key hung about his neck by a leather thong.

In the box he had more money of Guatemala and tattered bills of one-, two-, five- and ten-dollar denomination of the United States. One bill attracted my eye and I picked it up curiously, while the man beamed upon us. It was a twenty-dollar note which would have been worth face value—but for that fateful April

day of 1865, when Lee surrendered to Grant. Not for worlds would I have proclaimed it valueless—not in Guatemala! Confederate notes could circulate for years in the stagnant reaches of that back-country, and none but a *gringo* recognize their true ancestry.

At the *comandancia* we turned over our passports to the well-rounded little colonel, but when he asked if we had had any trouble on the trail from Concepcion I assured him that we had enjoyed every step of the way. There were several reasons for maintaining silence concerning our adventure of the afternoon. The famous *penitenciaría* in Guatemala City was one. We had no desire to be clapped in jail, charged with robbery and murder, perhaps, of peaceful citizens of the republic! So we wiped our memories clean of untoward incidents.

The Salvadoran woman relieved us of eighteen pesos when we returned to our lodging-place, so I decided that the bundle of paper within my shirt wouldn't be with us long enough to prove a burden.

We waked at midnight when a tremendous hammering was set up at the locked gate leading into our courtyard bedroom. The little daughter of the house came out rubbing her eyes, and unlocked the gate, through which clattered a dozen big mules, ridden by a troop of travellers of both sexes.

They were laughing and chattering at the top of their voices, and several began to shout for the people of the house to bring food and coffee. At last the Salvadoran woman appeared, very angry at being waked, to tell them shortly that she had no food to sell them. She shooed them from the courtyard like chickens, they laughing at her surliness, and when the gate was locked behind them we fell asleep once more.

The air was frosty and we had no blankets. We tossed

and turned in the thin hammocks for a time, then got up and looked about for shelter. A great pile of cornstalks covered one end of the verandah, and by burrowing into these, and rolling in the hammocks, we enjoyed the warmest night since leaving Santa Ana.

At three o'clock we waked and stumbled through the darkness toward the plaza. Here, lying with feet extended toward the embers of their fires, were the blanket-shrouded figures of the country-people, a morgue-like array. A drowsy policeman gave us directions which sent us out upon a trail that promised to furnish as many perspiring moments as any we had yet seen.

A dusky greyness was upon the landscape, an opaque mist through which our feet groped for the trail. We slid cautiously down breath-taking slopes, with black masses of undergrowth on either hand. A stumble might mean only a fall upon our noses over a mole-hill or—the chances were about even—a tumble over a high precipice. At last we came to a gurgling stream in the valley-bottom and paused to make hasty toilets. A group of chattering girls passed us at the ford, halted to scoop up handfuls of water, then went striding up the narrow trail we had just descended, under burdens which would have knocked either of us in a heap within ten minutes.

A faint lightening of the drab curtain in the east soon made going better. We headed up the slope toward the north and Chiquimula, our noses wrinkling rabbit-wise in the quest for the first faint odour of boiling coffee from the scattered cabins along the way.

In Central America, where most of the houses are built without chimneys, the sight of smoke belching from every interstice of a red-tiled roof is no matter for thought of shrieking for the fire department ; it is a sign, merely, that culinary operations have commenced.



So we examined thoughtfully each roof we passed. At a little hut two leagues beyond Quezaltepeque the old woman who was the only occupant—if one excepts the dogs, the pigs, the chickens, parrots, macaws and vermin which inevitably share the shelter with the natives—had just risen. She offered to serve us coffee and cakes if we would wait until her fire was burning.

The roof of her little cabin projected in front to form a rude verandah, and under this shelter she had placed a long mahogany table near the clay beehive oven. Coffee she made in a blackened earthenware vessel, then from a crudely woven rush basket came little sweet cakes of mixed corn-meal and wheat-flower.

With a black cigarette between her shrivelled lips she squatted on the dirt floor of the verandah near our feet, to watch us eat. Not with any friendly interest, but to tally the cakes we consumed. Talk she would not, as she sat there like an unusually withered mummy, with dingy black *mantilla* about her grizzled head.

However, when Norm had finished his eleventh cake and I my fourth, and we reached together toward the basket for a fresh supply, a flicker of apprehension lit up her stolid eyes. Thus far she had seen no money, and the thought that we might decamp without settling for our meal evidently troubled her.

We paid our score of six pesos and sat for a time on the bench before the cabin to watch the *cargadores* jog past under great back-loads of cornstalks or bunches of greenish bananas, supported by tump-lines across the forehead.

The Spanish blood has barely leavened the masses of Guatemala. Pure Indian is the proletariat, with aquiline features, swarthy colouring and glittering, beady



eyes. In disposition, also, they remind one of the stolid savages of our own West.

Each man turned slightly as he passed, to stare blankly at us, but returned never a word to our greetings. These packers were the biggest, sturdiest breed we saw anywhere in Central America; the average height of both men and women—there seemed little difference between the sexes in muscular development—was not less than five feet nine. All were very broad of shoulder, with barrel-like chests, and their necks, constantly strained against the pull of the forehead tump-lines, were corded with muscle like the necks of professional wrestlers.

There seemed to be much difference of opinion among the natives as to the distance separating us from Chiquimula. Some said seven, some eight, others nine leagues. We had set our hearts on making Zacapa by noon of Sunday, and this was Saturday morning. So we kept up a steady pace, trying to ignore our blistered feet. Our boots were just a half-size too large for comfortable walking and, despite the bandages we had improvised, the tops of our feet were cruelly chafed and bleeding.

A young Chinaman, very comfortable and contented upon his fat mule, smiled blandly down upon us and informed us that we *might* make Chiquimula by evening—if we “hurried like hell!” It was still seven leagues, by his account, so we strode on grimly under a sun that seemed to gather the heat of the universe and focus it in a single beam upon our heads, over the worst trail we had yet seen.

We had been warm in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and on the Salvadoran trails we had believed the extreme of heat had been reached, but that weary day was the hottest either of us had ever known in any part of the

world. The stony paths we had traversed on the preceding day began to assume the aspect of perfect highways in our memories, as we stumbled over the rough, dusty, zigzagging trail up and down those endless, endless mountains.

Guatemalticos of both sexes and all ages thronged the road in picturesque procession, returning from the *fiesta* at Quezaltepeque. Some were astride horses and mules, with tiny metal or earthen coffee-pots, heavy woollen blankets and bundles of food dangling from their saddles, for the native travelling spends but little on hotel accommodations. But the large majority were afoot, carrying their equipage on head or back.

They travelled in groups, the people of each village walking together, chattering, laughing, playing practical jokes upon each other, nodding energetically so that the yellow, gourdlike fruit and the flowers which adorned their hats shook like jesters' bells. Here and there a dignified, middle-aged woman, strikingly Indian-like of features, bestrode ancient horse or mule, with a child in her arms and another riding pillion behind her, and led her family homeward. The older children marched sturdily in her wake, stirring up huge clouds of dust with their sandalled feet.

The Latins—and the peoples upon which they have placed their hands—seem to have a sense of beauty, an appreciation of it evidenced with utter lack of the self-consciousness of the average American or Englishman. Keep watch upon any street in our large cities and count the number of *boutonnieres* seen. From personal observation I know the number will be small. But all the way north from Costa Rica we had passed stalwart *hombres* on the narrow trails—dark-faced men clad usually in the pyjama-like overalls common to the

*peones*—with a brilliant jungle-flower thrust rakishly behind an ear.

Some dim groping after a little of the beauty so lacking in their filthy hovels, their whole drab, animal-like existence, may have been shown by the instinct that led them to decorate themselves with wild flowers, to crown their ox-yokes with blooms.

But they showed none of the embarrassment at comment upon the ornaments that farmers in the States would evince. (That is, if our prosaic farmers were guilty in the first place of such show of sentiment !)

We overtook a miniature *hombre* of seven years, clad in "pyjamas" and sandals, with a huge *sombrero* upon his tousled black head and a small machete at his side. He was going to visit his grandmother, he said, and had been on the road since daybreak. Further inquiry developed the fact that he had already walked twelve miles, and that his grandmother lived on the outskirts of Chiquimula. He had often made the journey, and saw nothing unusual in a hike of nearly forty miles.

The last league is ever the longest. Chiquimula was always "just around the corner; *cerquita* !" (" *Cerca* " is the Spanish equivalent of "near," but seldom or never did we hear that word from these incorrigible optimists. Almost always they added the diminutive "*ita* " and made it—conversationally, at least—"very near.")

But even Chiquimula is eventually attained by those who limp doggedly onward. Through intense sunlight, across a land of billowing, chalky hills untouched by cultivation, over the ruddy, dust-choked trail, we came to the usual straggling streets lined with whitewashed adobe houses. There was an hotel—of a kind—close to the plaza ; a boy showed us to the bath-house, then we ate.

The *comandancia* was more pretentious than those of

Concepcion and Quezaltepeque ; for Chiquimula boasts ten thousand inhabitants and is the most important place in the south of Guatemala. The central plaza was one of the most beautiful we had seen, bordered with feathery-topped palms, with lines of squat, tiled-roofed buildings, each with a broad verandah crowded with lounging citizens, facing it on the four sides. The townspeople were hugging the shade about the plaza ; none of them seemed to have any other labour in life than to avoid heating their blood by exercise. From within the " School of Manual Arts of Manuel Estrada Cabrera " came a drowsy hum as the students droned their lessons ; the loudest sound in all the town.

A surly lieutenant, backed by two ragamuffins armed with prehistoric Mausers which might have been loaded, barred our entry into the sacred precincts of the *comandancia*. He took our passports and later, when we had tired of cooling our heels on the verandah and started indoors, ushered us into the sanctum sanctorum, or holy of holies, and so before the *Comandante* himself.

This official was a short, stout, shrewd-faced Guatemalteco of middle age, uniformed in clean unbleached linen. He rose from his chair as we entered and bowed very courteously. He opened out our passports and inquired as to the weapons we carried. For a time I took refuge behind the time-honoured " I cannot understand," but after the matter had been explained in detail with profuse gestures by *Comandante*, secretary and lieutenant (the latter wished to shoot us offhand on general principles, we thought, judging from his ferocious eye), I tapped the sheath-knife at my belt and murmured "*Bastante !*" (" Enough ! ").

Now the *Comandante* obviously disbelieved that we had faced the mountain trails of the unsavoury Chiqui-



mulin region without arms. It isn't done in the best circles at any season. But it would have required a search of our persons to locate the six-guns holstered beneath our left arms, and he was not, apparently, prepared to go to such lengths. So he shook his head sorrowfully at thought of our duplicity and handed back the passports with a bow.

The shops of Chiquimula were the weirdest store-houses of articles native and articles foreign, of objects useful and objects which no brain-cudgelling could supply a prospective use for, that we had yet encountered. We pushed our way into one such *tienda* and looked about in bewilderment, for from floor to roof was stacked an array of goods ranging from coils of barbed-wire to rubber baby-bottle nipples. It looked exactly as if the shopkeeper had ordered the entire contents of a Montgomery Ward catalogue and had secured delivery on the ground by one discharge of a steam-shovel.

"If you don't see what you want, ask for it," murmured Norm. "He's got it."

So I demanded cigarette papers—*papel de cigarro*—and the languid, yellow-faced clerk, without a flicker of change in his expression to denote consideration, thrust his arm into the heap and drew out a red-wrapped bundle, from which he extracted a sheet of paper the size of a small blanket.

"*Un peso*," he grunted, while we stared, for even in that fecund soil we hadn't expected to see cigarette papers grown to such dimensions. Then it dawned upon us that in Guatemala one cut one's cigarette papers to desired size from the raw material.

The road out of Chiquimula was a revelation—carefully graded, level, wide, but traversing the same arid, chalky, sparsely settled hill-country as to the south.



## THE PICTURESQUE ROAD TO THE NORTH 229

It was fenced by the tall, candelabra-shaped *cacti* called *tuno*, the fallen spines of which rendered taking a seat beside the road a matter requiring extreme caution.

As we left the outskirts of Chiquimula we were joined by a boy of fourteen, who insisted upon bearing us company. He asked innumerable questions about our personal affairs, until Norm began to believe him sent after us by the *Comandante* to spy upon us. He wanted to know why we had photographed the plaza in the city when we wouldn't sell the pictures; why we were visiting Guatemala; why we walked instead of riding as other *gringos* did. His thirst for information was the most remarkable we had encountered, even in a land where anybody's business is everybody's concern.

It was cooler than in the morning, so, in spite of the twenty-four miles lying behind us on the white road, of which our weary muscles reminded us constantly, we hobbled forward at a fair cripples' gait. Progress was a matter of threading our way through the mule-trains, going around the ox-carts laden with huge cakes of crude brown sugar and cheeses the size of dining-room tables bound for the railway station at Zacapa, or stepping aside to let a troop of travellers—male and female, all mule-back—pass us. It was a picturesque, busy scene, that road to the north.

The boy led us over a mountain shoulder by a rough trail which he assured us cut a league from the distance. We found the view from the height well worth the breathless climb, for below us the white road curved leisurely around the foot of the great shoulder we had ascended, and behind lay Chiquimula like a dream-city, every sordid touch removed by distance, the white buildings gleaming like snow beneath the golden light of late afternoon.

The short-cut brought us out upon the road at a higher point, and at an open-faced shed which served as a military post the boy left us. Zacapa lay but four leagues beyond, the soldiers told us, so we moved forward. Around the next curve in the road we came out upon the edge of a long, steep slope, ending far below in a broad, green-floored valley. White houses lay in the hollow beyond a broad, straight stream that glinted like a polished rapier. Zacapa !

Sunset came. We had seen many, each different from the one before, and it would be a dull soul that could grow sated with the glories of a tropic sunset : the raw, red disk of the sun flaring through the leaden mists that overhung the peaks, the clear topaz, the smoky amber, the ochre, the umber, the turquoise ; the unearthly gold of the scalloped cirrus clouds hanging above the farther mountain-tops like the fabled Golden Fleece, for the moment, then paling, with the fading of the light behind, to delicate violet and lilac !

The soft haze of twilight enveloped the road, more lavender than grey, as we went down the slope through the peace of evening to a group of thatched huts that marked a halting-place of the mule-trains. Dusk was falling as we reached the door of the nearest cabin ; someone inside lit a kerosene-lantern. From the interior came the sound of laughter and talking.

We were given seats at an unpainted mahogany table in the rude verandah of the rest-house. A buxom girl brought us *pan dulce* and *tamales* of pork-fat like those of Salvador, and cups of inky *café*. When the last crumb had vanished we turned upon the bench to smoke and watch the shifting scene in the dooryard of this wayside halting-place.

Again it was as if I had opened the pages of *Kim* and

sat beside him in one of the *paraos* beside the Indian roads. But on closer examination the scene more nearly resembled a traditional conception of a robbers' den.

Beside tiny fires built of a half-dozen twigs each squatted sandalled men and barefooted women, cigarettes drooping from their lips, boiling coffee or broiling long strips of dried meat and talking at the tops of their shrill voices. The red glow of the little fires rendered blacker the surrounding darkness that was as frame and background to the picture, struck answering gleams from beady black eyes and illumined the bold, aquiline features transmitted to this people from savage Mayan forbears.

*Tortillas*, *guaro* and coffee were for sale inside the house. The travellers ate and drank as they waited for the moon to light them on their way. All of them imbibed much of the fiery *guaro* and arguments were frequent among the members of the various groups. But the soberer ones separated those who flashed out their machetes in sudden gusty rages and no casualties resulted.

Robberies were common in this region and agents of the bandits were said to visit such wayside rest-houses as this to select their victims. So we sat with shirts open at the throat and revolver-butts pulled well forward where they were ready to hand, while we waited with the others for the white moonlight to drive the shadows from the road.

As the time passed the arguments about the fires grew hotter. There was hardly a sober member of any group in the yard; staggering men stumbled into the house for more *guaro* and stumbled back with added fuel for their comrades' tempers. A drunken *hombre*

planted himself on the bench beside me with many protestations of friendship for "*gringo* devils," and commenced a long, rambling anecdote. But he was barely half-way through his tale when he fell suddenly forward in a drunken stupor.

Undoubtedly, some part of the heritage of the average Anglo-Saxon is the instinct to clean up a mess wherever found. Always, as we watched these people, there rose in us a vast disgust at the depths of their sloth, which keeps them bedded down in filthy hovels, ambitionless, future-less. There came the impulse to roll up sleeves and start immediately at the work of reform. Always, too, came the thought, "What *couldn't* the white man's industry and perseverance do with these countries!"

From the lips of other wanderers I have many times heard that same exclamation in their discussions of the Five Republics. A letter from Edgar Young—who knows the land of the Banana Flag as he knows the fingers of his "operating-hand"—expressed it in almost his first paragraph.

Frankly, I hesitate to voice either hope or despair concerning the future of these countries—under the rule of the native himself. As a people, the Latins have no such record of reclamation of waste lands as their fairer brothers. In Mexico, indeed, the Spaniard has put his imprint upon the people almost as thoroughly as the Puritans stamped New England. But we see in Mexico to-day—and in Central America also—progress coming principally, if not wholly, at the demand of foreigners, and progress, even then, limited to certain industries, localities almost; progress and civilization virtually rammed down the throats of the natives.

In the United States I have seen the negroes of my



own Southland dwelling in squalor and poverty almost equal to that of the miserable Latin American *peon*, but there the comparison ends. The negro's low condition is the exception, not the rule, nor has the *peon* an encircling prosperity and example of industry to spur him from his slough. Nor, with all justice to the Latinized races from Mexico to Panama, do I think the *peon* stands, as did the negro of, say, ten or fifteen years ago, ready to hold up his head as a citizen.

If any man tells me that even sixty per cent. of the Guatemalticos (for instance) are "civilized," I must shut my eyes, visualize the land as I saw it and the fierce-eyed, hook-nosed wanderers met with upon the mountain trails, then—smile.

At ten-thirty we drank a last cup of coffee and set out with the vanguard of the passengers. The dim moonlight shining through the rain-clouds peopled the road with fantastic shadows; the tall *cacti* threw grotesque, wavering figures upon the white dust; the outline of trees and bushes played flickeringly across the track before us. There were many ox-carts drawn off the road, the oxen chewing their cuds, the drivers—sometimes whole families—asleep inside beneath an improvised canopy, all waiting for daylight.

It was nearly two o'clock when we came to the ford of the Rio Zacapa, a league south of the sleeping town. The river gurgled over the shallows that here stretched a hundred yards from bank to bank. It was dark in the shadow of the trees that lined the shore, and in this dusky alley the line of the ford was none too distinct. A stillness as of the tomb rested over all the slumbering land, except that, far behind us in the direction of the rest-house, the shrill yells of drunken *peones* came to us, softened by the distance.



A troop of men and women on mule-back, all very drunk and talkative, trotted past us and splashed into the water. We undressed, and with boots, trousers and underclothing slung across our hammock rolls stepped gingerly into the chill water and started across. I was perhaps thirty yards in the lead, placing my feet very cautiously to avoid deep holes and with the sharp stones that paved the stream-bed bringing fresh twinges from chafed feet. Then a frantic yell from Norm halted me in midstream. I whirled, nearly tumbling headlong, grabbing for the six-shooter atop my pack, balancing like a tightrope-dancer against the breast-high current, for from his tone I thought some sudden danger threatened.

"Give me a match," he demanded, and when his cigarette was once more glowing, led the way with very indecorous whoops to the farther bank.

We squatted upon rocks at the water's edge to don our clothing and—perhaps because of our very excess of caution—the stone upon which we were sitting turned turtle and we sat down most ungracefully in a foot of very cold water. Our nether dampness soon ceased to matter, for the massed clouds that obscured the moon let down a fine, soaking drizzle and we were wet through to our skins before we came to the ghostly outskirts of Zacapa.

From end to end of the town we wandered, and at last sought shelter beneath the umbrella-like foliage of a matapala near the plaza. Here we remained until dawn, with curious dogs and pigs coming up to sniff, then found a little inn where repeated hammering upon the door brought mine host—shrouded of head and dragging after him a six-foot smoothbore—to let us in, if reluctantly.

We were dog-tired, for we had walked almost steadily

from three to three—twenty-four hours—and had covered more than forty-five miles of mountain trails. Our feet were almost skinless, but Guatemala was only eighty-odd miles, by rail; six hours on the little narrow-gauge train would set us in the capital. The end of the real trail had come.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PARIS OF CENTRAL AMERICA

NOTES ON MISSING A TRAIN—AMERICAN CLUB SALON—SUNBURNED GUATEMALA—ARRIVAL IN THE CAPITAL—A VETERAN SOLDIER OF FORTUNE—REVOLUTION SIMMERS—WE BECOME SPIES—THE GREAT UNIONIST DEMONSTRATION—OUTWARD BOUND—PUERTO BARRIOS AND A STEAMER HOME.

**Z**ACAPA, lying on the trans-continental railway midway between Puerto Barrios on the Caribbean Sea and Guatemala City in the mountains, has two trains daily. These pass each other with considerable ceremony in the yards of Zacapa at midday, when a brief halt is made to let the passengers get luncheon at the town's principal hotel.

We lounged in hammocks in the patio, observing the waking of a typical Guatemalan inn and its subsequent Sunday-morning activities, until eight o'clock. When the landlord and his family had speeded the last parting guest through the impressive gateway, and the last jingle of saddlery had died away in the distance, mine host approached us with cordiality which was a sharp contrast to the suspicion he had displayed at our entrance. He explained that our manner of arousing him had smacked strongly of a bandit raid, but now he had decided that we were respectable citizens, even though foreigners. A wave toward the patio dining-room, where a *mozo* had just set out steaming coffee-pots concluded his *amende*.

After breakfast we bundled our possessions in a hammock. The landlord assured us that the up-train, that for the capital, pulled out of Zacapa station at one in the afternoon. We should have known better than to accept his account, but we sauntered into the station at half-past twelve and looked about us.

The *estación* was a two-story frame structure, painted a familiar yellow, like the little stations of South-west Texas or Arizona. When we came in it was filled with natives who sprawled upon the benches, squatted on the dirty floor among their bundles and baskets, or moved among the throng in search of something or someone, I could never decide which, or what.

There was a train drawn up before the platform near the verandah of the hotel which fronted on the tracks, from which passengers came and went. The engineer smoked placidly in the cab, with feet thrust through the unglazed window. But it was the down-train, that for Puerto Barrios. A mile or more away a black plume of smoke floating lazily above the yellow hills marked the course of the up-train we had missed by ten minutes.

There was nothing to be gained by letting our tempers get away. We bought tickets for the morrow's train and stood for a little time watching the crowd of *pasajeros*. In Zacapa we noted the distinct negroid strain which marks the region about the railway, due probably to the assimilation of the Jamaican and Honduran negroes imported by the Fruit Company to labour on the banana plantations that line the railway. Many full-blooded negroes moved among the Guatemalticos and half-breeds, most of them well dressed and very pompous in manner. Whenever a group of them stood in a shady spot discussing grave national affairs with the dignity of European statesmen, there rose the

whining, clipped English, almost cockneyish in accent, which marks the negro of British possessions.

For the rest, Zacapa was busier than any of the other Guatemalan towns we had seen. A handful of Americans and Britons worked in the railway-shops here, the Americans in the employ of the Fruit Company came into town frequently, and all this, with the sprinkling of negroes, seemed to energize somewhat the slothful mass of native blood. The white streets—white with the dust that was the only pavement; white with the lines of one-story adobe houses and shops; with a white incandescence that lay like the ray of a searchlight over all when the sun was at meridian—ambled toward the town's outskirts and there disappeared in the yellow land of the country. The heat was stifling, withering. Every bit of vegetation which should have been green was sickly yellow in hue; the leaves of the stunted trees hung anæmically, as if the plant gasped for air.

A neat sign upon the front of a white building near the *estación* caught our eye—"The American Club." We crossed the street and entered a long, dusky room, pleasantly cool in contrast to the blazing glare of the street. An ancient, stooping white man stood behind the rough bar, dispensing *guaro* to a trio consisting of two parts American negro and one part Irish-American.

Charley Swanson, the proprietor, greeted us and set *limonadas* on a table in the corner, where a tiny air-current came in from the garden in the rear of the house. The negroes eyed us curiously, and one came rolling over to explain to us the evil effects of *refrescos* (soft drinks) upon the constitutions of "Americans" in the tropics. His manner was that of one condescendingly acknowledging equals. We ignored him and presently he returned to his companions at the bar.





GARRISON AT CONCEPCION, OUTSIDE COMANDANCIA.



CHARLEY SWANSON'S "AMERICAN CLUB SALON," ZACAPA.



Charley had beds to let, canvas cots covered with coarse cotton sheets of dazzling whiteness. We tossed our bundle into a corner of the tiny stall allotted to us, snapped the lock on the door and returned to the bar-room, attended by the negroes who had accompanied us to our *dormitorio*.

The larger negro—he who had invited us to drink with him—began to make inquiries as to our past, present and future. Both negroes were half-drunk, and we had no desire to court trouble with the authorities by squelching him *à la* the Southern States. But he regarded our attitude as a personal insult. When he shoved a glass of *guaro* across the table at Norm and commanded him to drink, the explosion came.

The negro skated backward across the bar-room floor, to slide gently to a sitting posture with back to wall. Here he lost all interest in the world, the flesh and the devil, for an iron fist, propelled by one hundred and eighty-odd pounds of trail-hardened muscle, had connected with the point of his chin.

His companion dragged him outside without comment, while Charley Swanson stared inscrutably through the door at the yellow slopes of the farther hills. Apparently he had seen nothing, but his right hand rested carelessly on the bar-edge and next day I saw a long-barrelled Colt upon a cleverly concealed shelf just beneath that spot.

The white man who had been standing with the negroes looked at Norm with unmistakable respect.

“I’m ‘California Jack’ Dempsey,” he informed us suddenly. “Every old-timer knows me. I used to fight all over the States. So I know what I’m a-talkin’ about when I say that was as pretty a knockout as ever I see outside a ring.”

Thereafter we had much difficulty in avoiding him. He was full of his grievances and bubbling over with conversation. He had come to Central America as blacksmith for the Fruit Company, he said, and they had given him "a crooked deal," so he quit them. Of the many derelicts and beach-combers we met, this broken-down prizefighter was the most unfitted for life in the tropics.

Loud-mouthed, obscene, with the mentality of a grammar-school boy and the senseless obstinacy of an army mule, he possessed a deep contempt for the "niggers" about him. Their inability to speak English he regarded as a personal affront, for which he could with difficulty be persuaded from hammering them. Even Charley Swanson, who termed Spanish "monkey talk" and insisted upon speaking English to the patrons of his combination bar and grocery store, warned Dempsey that his end would come suddenly from a knife between the ribs if he persisted in his wanton insults of the natives about him.

Charley had been a cook on schooners plying the Gulf of Mexico, and his twenty years of wandering in the banana-lands had not lost him his skill. He set out beefsteaks and hot white bread from his oven, with coffee (*not* "café") and mango pie with a crust that melted in the mouth. Dempsey went out to a native house to eat, then returned to sit in a corner and curse the country.

Revolution was brewing in Guatemala—had been simmering for a year. Charley was cautious in his comment, for everything he owned in the world was within the walls of this little house and he knew the extent of the secret service of the Dictator, Estrada Cabrera. Every American resident for any length of

time in the country is full of stories of the mysterious band of adventurers drawn from every race which serves the Dictator. Cabrera's spy-system is another favourite theme of conversation.

"Stand upon a street-corner in any town in Guatemala and whisper to a companion a remark about the government of Guatemala. Instantly a half-dozen blanketed heads will be raised cautiously and a group of blank-faced Indians who had been, apparently, soundly sleeping will rise and saunter on and—within an hour—the speech will be in the hands of Cabrera. That's the spy-system of Guatemala!"

So an American of phlegmatic disposition described it to us. Charley's account was in much the same vein, and he added the information received by him the day before that "something" was scheduled to upset the peace of the capital within a day or two.

Despite the rumours of revolution, we slept soundly that night. Charley waked us at dawn for breakfast, and, when his little daughters had cleared away the dishes, went about his daily work. We watched the bar for him, selling rice and black beans to the bare-footed women who came padding in, *guaro* to the men. Our business over the bar was much larger than that in household goods; the Guatemaltico is the heaviest drinker of any of the natives of the countries of the Banana Flag; one saw the men—and the women, also—sleeping off the effects of their liquor in every shady spot along the streets. Practically every store in Zacapa also held a Government licence to vend *guaro*.

A warning whistle from the station at noon sent us hustling out, followed by Charley's invitation to come again and stay with him as long as we desired. (This was a shrewd business stroke on Charley's part, for the



novelty of having two *gringos* wait upon them had kept a steady stream of men and women coming and going through the doors of the "American" all morning.)

The train was no different from the others we had seen except that, perhaps, the third-class coach—there was no second class—was dirtier and more crowded. For a few miles beyond Zacapa, as far as the quarries which employ several Americans and Englishmen, the track crossed a level, almost arid plain. Here and there, standing listlessly in the scant shade of thorny bushes along the shallow streams, were bony cattle tended by apathetic *savoneras* on short-barrelled little ponies, who stared apathetically at the crawling train.

Up, always up, trended the track. In the station at Zacapa I had invested three pesos of our dwindling hoard of Guatemalan *billetes* for three bunches of the thin cigarettes of the *país*, which melt away like wax in the fingers. We sprawled comfortably upon two seats, as usual—also ignoring the "*No se fumar permite*" sign, as usual—and watched the landscape unroll outside the windows. Water seemed to be the crying need; the parched yellow plains reminded me poignantly of the Texas prairies in drought-time.

In the tiny villages we passed—no more than a half-dozen mud huts along the track—the people came languidly to their doors to stare, and the tatterdemalions of the army leaned upon their weapons while they watched. The provincial troops were pitiful ragamuffins, armed either with carved wooden guns such as that of the sentry at Concepcion, or with venerable long-barrelled smoothbores divided in a ratio of one gun to three soldiers; one bearing the gun, one the ramrod of telegraph wire, the third carrying the leather cartridge-box.



ONE OF THE POLICE FORCE, SALVADOR.



ONE OF CARRERA'S "HELLCAT" INFANTRY-  
MEN, GUATEMALA.



There was another American in the train. He knew the capital and volunteered his services as guide. His account of Guatemalan affairs occupied us during the long afternoon, while the little engine puffed and panted over the mountain grades. Dusk came as we reached the end of the journey and the train went crawlingly over a high trestle spanning a deep, narrow gorge.

Two white domes gleamed in the twilight; lights flickered ahead of us; we pulled through square after square of ruined buildings, grim reminders of the earthquake of 1917-18. In the litter and desolation we saw hundreds of makeshift shelters of cloth and heaped stones, where the inhabitants live on the sites of their former homes.

At least a third of the ninety thousand people of the capital still live so, for the work of rebuilding goes on very slowly; almost every public building is surrounded by the scaffolding of the repair parties, where handfuls of labourers gather. Prior to the earthquake, Guatemala City was known as the "Paris of Central America." Certainly, in point of size and the number of Europeans and Americans residing or visiting in the capital, it would ordinarily be one of the most pleasant cities of Latin America in which to idle for a month. So much we gathered from the account of our new acquaintance, and from the glimpse of the town we got in the trip from station to Hôtel Grace.

There is no more homelike hostelry in the Five Republics than the Grace, kept by Captain Grace—ex-Texas ranger, civil engineer and wanderer. Here we had dinner among groups of our own kind—English, Americans, French—dressed as conventionally as in any restaurant of an American city.

During the meal Captain Grace located us a room in

the Gran Central, and when we had finished our meal Rogers guided us to this hotel. As we entered the long passage leading from street to patio, he pointed out a big, red-faced man in grey business-dress, with a Stetson upon his white hair, who leaned against the entrance-wall chatting with a gaily uniformed army officer.

"Lee Christmas," said Rogers, and we turned for a long look, for the name is one to conjure with throughout the length of Central America.

Locomotive engineer originally, but for years revolutionist, power behind the powers of various republics, commissioned general in the army of Spanish Honduras, military adviser to Estrada Cabrera the Dictator of Guatemala, born leader of men, Christmas was, to me, the most interesting character in all the Five Republics.

At the office we registered, then the clerk wrote our names upon the great blackboard in the patio which served as room-directory. Norm nodded toward the board and I saw that Christmas's name was just above ours, as occupant of the room adjoining.

An hour later I knocked upon his door, and as I waited in the balcony outside his room there came to my mind a jumble of the facts and fictions current about him. Under thin disguise of fiction "O. Henry," who spent some time in Central America during the height of Christmas's notoriety, has presented "*El General*" to his readers. Newspaper correspondents have written columns about his career; no white man is as well known in the republics to-day as the General. I recalled the stories of his unsleeping vigilance, which had several times foiled attempts upon his life; of his suspicion of all strangers; of his deadly accuracy with rifle and revolver.



Then a deep-voiced reply to my knock and I entered. Christmas was not visible at first, but when I had closed the door behind me I saw him, chair tilted back on two legs and leaning against the sidewall so that he could see anyone entering before being seen.

My first impression was one of disappointment. A big man, well over six feet and of portly build, dressed in ordinary civilian garb, with hat-brim pulled down so that the upper half of his florid face was enshadowed; there was nothing in either expression or appearance to coincide with the stories concerning Central America's most noted soldier of fortune.

Despite the round, unwinking blue eyes, watchful, more than a trifle suspicious, unblinking as a hawk's, he was far more like some peaceful householder finished with the day's work than a man whose very life depended upon his own ability to hold it. A newspaper lay open across his knees and his left hand gripped nothing more sinister than a pair of old-fashioned silver-bowed spectacles.

Then he came to his feet as I gave my name and explained my errand. As he straightened his open coat fell back a trifle and for an instant the brown butts of two Lueger automatics peeped out. After that glimpse it wasn't so hard to believe this big, quiet-spoken man to be the desperate leader of brown fighting-men, hero of a thousand daredevil exploits, the only white man who ever held written commission as field-general from Honduras.

We talked of his career, but he was wondering (he said later) if I was a spy of some sort, and so spoke very cautiously, confining his statements to generalities. When he mentioned men and places it was by other than their proper names, for some of these men were still

active in governmental affairs and—it had been only a few months since he had nearly succumbed to a dose of poison slipped into his food by an unknown enemy. (Christmas always insisted grimly that he had no known enemies. “They’re all dead,” he would add, a bit ambiguously.)

He came strolling over to our table in the patio dining-room next morning and dropped into a chair opposite us. After the meal we took a turn about the capital and left Christmas outside the *cuartel* chatting with some of his acquaintances among the army officers while we went to the Ministry on a pessimistic search for mail. Our progress had been much more rapid than we (or our commiserating acquaintances) had believed possible. We had outstripped the mule-trains, which are the most rapid means of locomotion on the trans-republics trails. So we found ourselves, as usual, ahead of our mail. But we had come to accept kinks in our schedule with placidity. If we had letters, we read them; if there were none, why, then, we occupied ourselves with other things.

In Guatemala City we saw the ancient and modern rub shoulders in more conspicuous fashion than anywhere else in Central America. A half-dozen automobiles jolt over the cobbled streets and halt at the corners to let a group of trotting, chanting *cargadores* (packers)—each of whom might be his own great-great-grandfather—jog past with the entire furnishings of some household, or a great burden of country-produce, upon their backs. A young man strolls along the sidewalk, arm-in-arm with his father; the youth’s clothing might have been purchased in any smart shop of New York or San Francisco, while the father’s garb is the straw hat, loose shirt hanging outside his trousers of faded cotton and the cow-hide sandals of the *peon*.

In a *carpintería* a small boy is wearily turning a hand-lathe that might have been running since the Spanish Conquest, while a short block away an enterprising American sells brightly painted gasoline-engines and caterpillar tractors. It is a place of light and shadow, of sharp-drawn contrasts on every hand.

The *cargadores*', or packers', guild was my principal source of entertainment. Men and women, boys and girls, were numbered among the packers, and all might have been members of the same family. Every one of them, from the most aged *hombre* or *mujer* to the tiniest *muchacho* or *niña*, was marked with the same characteristics.

A dozen times an hour they came jogging past the hotel-entrance where we lounged in the half-sunshine, half-shade, that makes the proper combination in this city of high altitude and intense sunlight.

Body swung forward from the waist and swaying gently, hips moving in a half-rotatory motion as the feet come forward in a pigeon-toed trot, there is about them a rhythm as infectious as that which marks a marching army. With a burden upon their backs so heavy that an able-bodied white man must have staggered in carrying it across a narrow street, they keep up that machine-like dog-trot, half-run, half-walk, uphill, downhill, on the level, all day long.

Even when they carried no burden, the trunk bent forward as if the forehead strained against an invisible tump-line, and the stiffened arms, hands clenched about a four-foot bamboo pole, moved from side to side before them in steady, rhythmical swing. To us watching, it was labour set to silent music; one might almost hear the cadence to which they seemed to move. Not even the coolies of Japan, trotting in pairs beneath burdens

swung on long poles between them, can equal in grace these dark Indian *cargadores* of Guatemalan trails.

Beside the packers, we had another interest, as we waited for the north-bound steamer to arrive in Puerto Barrios. Revolution—that which Charley Swanson had sniffed—was coming to a head in the capital. The city buzzed with rumours of an uprising planned by the Unionists. Half the city suspected the other half of nameless, terrible schemes, and none knew exactly what Manuel Estrada Cabrera, the shrewd doctor-politician who had ruled the country for more than twenty years, intended to do.

We had letters of introduction to Cabrera and various prominent men of his *ménage*, but the tension in the political situation made us consider their presentation somewhat indiscreet. We put them away and merely watched events, with Lee Christmas as translator of their significance.

As the former military adviser of Cabrera, Lee was suspected by the Unionist party, while the Liberals, the “Ins,” knew that he had quarrelled with the Dictator, and believed him to have joined forces with the young party. So he was watched by the spies of both parties. Lee, to whom eventually comes every shred of important information about men and affairs in the Five Republics, sat placidly in the patio of the Central, or moved with equal placidity about the streets, talking to members of both factions and watching affairs with the academic interest of an expert chess-player observing a championship game.

It was his fondness for practical jokes that brought us actively into the revolution—more actively, at any rate, than we had anticipated or desired.

Our ostensible business in the capital—or lack of it



—was known, of course, to both the American and Guatemalan authorities, but our khakis, boots and Stetsons were redolent of “uniform” to the secret police of the Dictator. So they came to Christmas, who knew them all, to ask confidentially our real errand in Guatemala. Being policemen, they refused to believe that we had intentionally spoken the truth.

Lee informed them, with vast and terrific secrecy, that we were really American artillerymen, come to spy out the weak places in the Dictator’s military establishment.

“So that the United States, when it attacks Guatemala next summer, will have all the necessary information,” concluded Christmas, and the policemen nodded wisely, for they had expected something of the kind. Give a man the job of smelling out crimes and his nose must feed itself on something, and he will manufacture mysteries if none come more legitimately.

Thereafter we were no sooner out of our little stall in the Central than the police popped in, to ransack our luggage in search of incriminating documents. Their searches—later, when our civilized apparel came up from San José and we doffed the garb of the trail—much increased our laundry bills. For the policemen apparently expected to find papers sewed up in our collars and shirts, and thumbed them very thoroughly with grimy paws.

We began to feel like Mr. Prout—hedged about with mysteries and enclosed in an atmosphere of stealthy intrigue—but regarded the dogging of our footsteps, the ransacking of our room, as annoying, but still Comedy. We laid many unsuccessful traps in the attempt to corner the searchers, promising ourselves the satisfaction of administering a business-like pounding; Norm swore that he would shove them between the bars of the window



and let 'em drop to the pavement below. This was on the day when they had left black fingerprints on his last clean collar, at a time when the laundress had taken furlough and he wished to *pasear* in the plaza where gathered the señoritas with their duennas. . . .

But when on the way home from the Grace one night, after a session with Rogers and Captain Grace, a big touring car, with no lights burning, leaped suddenly and directly at us, gathering racing speed as it came, and we saved ourselves only by a frantic leap to the innermost edge of the sidewalk, the thing began to look serious. Melodrama it might seem, regarded from the cool and distant States, but these people live in an atmosphere of intrigue and conspiracy, and assassination of enemies of the Government was by no means uncommon.

After the "accident" of the touring car, we were more cautious in our comings and goings; we hugged the walls of buildings at corners and swung wide of dark doorways. Our six-shooters we retained even when our trail-outfits were packed away, in holsters under our coats, and we berated Lee Christmas for setting the secret service on our heels. He laughed uproariously and told us that it was education for us; we would be better men—if we survived.

Again coming from the Grace, one pitch-dark night nearly a week later, we crossed a narrow street near the American Legation and had made the opposite side when from behind us sounded revolver-shots. Bullets thudded into walls somewhere behind us and we dived into a doorway with the motions of a prairie-dog seeking sanctuary.

When we peered cautiously out from the shadow and looked in the direction from which the shots had come, there was nothing to see. Not a soul moved in the

street in either direction, nor had the firing, apparently, attracted any attention.

We waited a long ten minutes, then decided that the sniper must have held his gun to the wall at the opposite corner and fired blindly, in native fashion, as fast as he could pull trigger. Evidently, after noting his failure to do more than frighten us half out of our wits, he had taken to his heels in the opposite direction.

So we made for the Gran Central as fast as mere legs could carry us, and at the very next corner all but collided with a uniformed policeman of the town, who smiled blandly upon us and wished us *buenas noches*. Publishing the affair would gain nothing, but out of curiosity I asked the limb of the law if he had heard firing a moment before. He shook his head without appearance of interest.

"No, señor," he said.

The Unionist Party had little success in their attempt to deceive Cabrera as to the real intent of the organization. A union of the Five Republics has been a favourite topic of discussion with theorists since the last federation fell to pieces in 1838; parties with this purpose for their platform have been organized in one or other of the republics at various times, and have accomplished nothing. Whether the leaders of the *Unionistas* in Guatemala really planned a coalition of the Banana Republics, none but themselves can say; at any rate, Cabrera must be overthrown before Guatemala could enter into such a union. So the Dictator extended the hospitality of the State to the party-leaders. Several of them were escorted to the cells of the famous *penitenciaría*, where they languished at the time of our stay in the capital.

The next move of the Dictator was to brand the move-

ment as a Bolshevist uprising and attempt to ram through Congress a word-for-word translation of the American Alien Sedition Bill, for use against the party.

Then came approval by Congress of the plan for the federation of the Central American Republics, and on March eleventh the leaders of the Unionist Party declared a holiday and a celebration. Each party-member—and the Unionists claimed a strength of some sixty thousand—was ordered to report at the Unionist headquarters to join the parade.

With American and British diplomats I watched the crowds, looking particularly for drunken men and men bearing arms. Norm was wandering on his own account, with the kodak, while Lee Christmas disappeared early in the afternoon.

While we stood watching someone pulled at my sleeve, and I turned to see an American negro, Santiago Scott, very drunk and very serious, who was the janitor of the Unionist Club. With that assumption of portentous gravity that sits so ludicrously upon the faces of his race, he led me into a little drinking-shop opposite the American Legation, to show me a large cartoon he had drawn.

It represented Cabrera as His Sable Majesty, with a forked, barb-ended tail upon which two small but very active figures, labelled "*Unionistas*," were dancing. Santiago was immensely proud of his handiwork, and pointed out its various shades of meaning. Then he drew from an inside pocket a gilded plaque bearing the Goddess of Liberty upon the face, and upon the reverse a conventional triangle with the liberty-cap and the words "*Dios, Libertad, Union*" ("God, Liberty, Union"), which he claimed to have designed for the party.

The *cantina* in which we stood was reported to be operated by the Dictator at a loss, to provide a base opposite the American Legation for his spies. I thought of this suddenly, when in the crowd about us—Liberals, to a man—I saw the faces of two men who had been pointed out the day before by Christmas as secret service agents. They were craning their necks to see Santiago's exhibits.

It occurred to me that Santiago was not the best companion that afternoon for a young man with no hankering for trouble, so I extracted from him a promise to bring the cartoon to the hotel that evening, then went hastily outside to resume my watch upon the crowds.

The mixed nature of the crowd was particularly interesting. Prosperous merchants, bankers, lawyers, physicians and their families, rubbed elbows with the clerks and the labourers. The universal representation might have been taken as proof of the popularity of the Unionists or—as one chose—the natural instinct of the native which leads him to any scene of excitement present or promised. All the faces were rather grave, for none knew, that sunny afternoon, but what the machine guns of Cabrera might be turned upon the crowds before the night.

The parade began to move at three o'clock, its destination the Military Academy, where Congress meets. The fifty-odd leaders were in the van, marching under a blue-and-white banner upon which was emblazoned the triangular shield of the country with the words, "God, Liberty, Union," of Santiago's plaque.

Then came the *obreros*—the workers—in files of eight, totalling approximately twenty-seven thousand men and youths. Counting the men and women who applauded



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fervently from the sidewalks or thronged about the flanks of the procession, there were fully fifty thousand sympathizers in the streets that day.

They marched quietly in the main, if not with overmuch gravity. In the faces of the younger men, at least, the grimness I had noted earlier in the afternoon had given way to a dancing devil of excitement, and I wondered what would be the result if the leaders lost control, even for a moment, of these men of ancient Indian stock, of simple, primitive instincts.

At the Military Academy the leaders of the parade were admitted to the Hall of Congress, but, as a subtle insult, through the back-door, as if they were *peones*. The President of Congress accepted the thanks of the Unionists for the passage of the Bill approving the union of Central American Republics and consented to address the party-members outside the gate.

At the front door of the Academy the legislators were halted by a group of soldiers in civilian clothing, who were posted there as "peaceful citizens interested in the making of their country's laws."

These men, who were said to be plied all day long with *guaro*, at Government expense, were reputed to be present whenever Congress was in session, their purpose being to prevent any demonstration unfavourable to the Dictator. Now they surged about the Solons, refusing to let them pass to the front portico of the building.

The President of Congress was no weakling. He forced his way through the soldiers and called upon the other congressmen to follow. The soldiers hesitated for a moment, then drew from their pockets the red calico chevrons which transform ordinary civilian attire into uniform, and pinned them on. Then, with coats thrown





MILITARY ACADEMY (ALSO HOUSE OF CONGRESS), BEFORE, REBUILDING,  
GUATEMALA C.TY.



PUBLISHING A "BANDO."

(Reading by a Government official at street corners a Decree just passed by Congress and approved by the President. This "bando" was the measure approving union of Central American Republics, March 12, 1929.)



back to reveal their weapons, they came to the outer portico and took up station behind the members of Congress and the Unionist leaders, who stood beside the Spanish Minister and the members of the various legations.

The crowd in the street surged toward the gate in order to hear the coming speech. A Government official, a man charged with many crimes, cried out :

“ Why don't you stop them ? Why doesn't someone shoot ? ”

Almost with his words came the sound of a revolver-shot. While none in the group could say who actually first pulled trigger, the shot came from the immediate vicinity of a colonel in the regular army of Guatemala, who had been standing with drawn revolver.

The foreign diplomats, with the members of Congress and the leaders of the Unionists, now stood between two prospective fires—that of the soldiers behind them and of the Unionists at the gate, who might be armed and who could hardly be expected to stand tamely under fire without returning it. The soldiers on the portico began firing in ragged volleys, most of their bullets, fortunately, going over the heads of the crowd.

Then one of the attachés from the American Legation seized the official who had precipitated the firing and demanded that he give the order to cease. The official gasped out the command and the soldiers lowered their revolvers sullenly. One Unionist was killed—he was afterwards buried in a soldier's uniform and officially proclaimed a victim of the barbarous Unionists, even while his family still searched for the body!—and a little girl, and a dozen or more were wounded. In the streets near the Academy, shortly after the cessation of the fire, as we went back toward town, we saw men

and women limping away from the scene, with blood dripping from bullet-wounds.

Just after the firing was halted the market-women—staunch Unionists all—seized cobble-stones from the street and raged up and down before the gates of the Academy like dusky furies, black hair flying and thin *camisas* slipping back over their brawny brown shoulders as they hurled the jagged stones.

“Follow us!” they were yelling, so that we heard them above the other cries of the crowd. “Let’s take their —— old Academy. Follow us! We’ll lead you!”

But the Unionists fell in again at their leaders’ commands and marched back to the city, now and then raising a cry of “Hurrah for the Little Party! Remember our first blood!”

The city was quiet on the surface that evening, with a tenseness in the atmosphere wherever one turned. The people didn’t gather upon the streets, for Cabrera had made no move and none knew what he might do. In the headquarters of the Unionists a throng of irrepressibles gathered and this was the noisiest spot we saw.

We sat with Lee Christmas in the patio of the hotel that evening, and the negro Santiago Scott came in and passed our table without seeming to see us. His lips moved steadily and we could hear him muttering to himself as he sat down in a chair behind a table in the corner with back to wall. He was drinking heavily, but it seemed to work no diminution in his habitual watchfulness. Christmas said that the police had been looking for Santiago during the afternoon.

As we watched, three secret service agents entered the patio and approached the negro’s table. When

they were still fully ten yards distant he jumped suddenly to his feet and yelled at them to keep back. They retreated hastily and left the patio, to return a few minutes later with three uniformed policemen.

Seemingly, they had little desire to face Santiago very close. Christmas, watching the scene with unblinking blue eyes, explained that the negro was known to be a killer, which gave the clue to the hesitation of the policemen. They had halted in the centre of the patio as if undecided as to the safest method of proceeding. They reminded me vividly of a gang of small boys inspecting a hornets' nest.

Santiago settled the matter for them. The liquor he had consumed seemed to be working him into a berserk mood. Suddenly, with an ear-splitting war-whoop, he swept glass and bottle to the stone floor and came to his feet. A flat-footed leap carried him to the top of his table, reaching beneath his coat-tails as he jumped. From each hip-pocket came an automatic pistol of .45 calibre and these he spun upon his forefingers and trained upon the policemen.

"Gangway!" he yelled. "Gangway! I's comin', an' when I comes I comes a-shootin'."

The policemen took him at his word—or rather at his gesture. From where we watched nervously—I speak for Norm and myself, for Christmas seemed more interestedly expectant than anything else—from beneath our table, we saw the policemen heading for the street. They were pointed for the Mexican border, and if they kept up the speed at which they started, Texas now has six new Guatemaltican residents.

Sometime after midnight Santiago applied to the American consul for protection, offering his bullet-pierced straw hat as evidence that his life had been



attempted, and stating that he had "got" one of the attacking party. Then the Unionists hustled him out of town and we saw no more of him.

We had exhausted the show-places of the capital. The various Government buildings, with their clutters of scaffolding; the parks and plazas; the relief map of Guatemala showing in concrete the mountains—we knew these well!—the rivers and the plains: we had seen them all and now we were anxious to be on the Out Trail before revolution actually broke and made departure more difficult.

Once more we boarded the little train, this time to get down at Puerto Barrios on the Caribbean Sea. Our departure would have been incomplete had we not stepped into a final tangle of official red-tape, to remind us of all we had ever experienced of Central American formalities.

We found the visa secured from the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the capital was not enough to clear us from the port. Before we could embark on a steamer, the *Comandante* must telegraph to Guatemala City and receive authority to issue us sailing-permits.

A brief hour before sailing-time the reply came—collect. We paid twenty pesos each for a slip of paper which the dock-sentry took from us without so much as glancing at it, then, after customs-inspection, climbed the gangway to the *Suriname's* deck.

The last bunch of green bananas came up the conveyor-belts and dropped into the hold, the lines were cast off, and midnight found us nosing out of the pretty harbour, with New Orleans somewhere "over the bow." We leaned on the after-rail and watched the lights of Puerto Barrios dropping behind the lacy fronds of the palms, and heaved sighs of mixed relief and regret.

The trail now lay behind us. Narrow, hoof-marked track that threaded emerald jungle, where the chattering of monkeys, the shrill cries of parrot and macaw alone broke the deathly stillness ; faint, dusty *camino* that crossed like a white rope the bare, brown plains, where overhead the *zopilotes* hung motionless against the cloudless blue and the high wind of the level spaces set parched grass quivering ; ancient, hard-trodden mule-path that climbed insanely with serpentine loop and whirl up and ever up the slopes and scarps of red-black mountains piled range after range against the far horizon. We looked back on all our way and knew that we would remember always.

But when I dropped my cigarette into the foaming water under the *Suriname's* counter and turned to Norm to ask if retrospect surpassed prospect, he grinned and blew a lingering kiss toward the dimming harbour-lights.

"*Adios !*" said Norm very emphatically. "*Es el fin !*"

Since here we come to the forking of the trail, I can only echo his words and give you—

THE END

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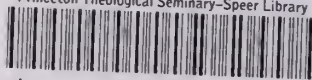




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